

Ideology and Atheism in the Soviet Union

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Ideology and Atheism in the Soviet Union

by
William van den Bercken

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The vignette on the cover of this book represents the symbol of the *Agathos Daimon*, the snake of the Good Spirit, known from Greek astrological and magical texts. As its Town God, the *Agathos Daimon* was believed to protect Alexandria, which was famous world-wide for its library with precious manuscripts and books.

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Preface

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Many thanks are due to my wife, Raisa, who, once again, gave me all opportunity to work. The book is dedicated to our children, Ilonka and Daria, who, by their spontaneous and difficult questions about God, embarrass both believers and atheists alike.

August 1987, University of Utrecht
William van den Bercken

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Introduction

This is a study of the place and function of atheism in Soviet ideology and society. As a matter of fact, there is probably no more atheism in Soviet society than in Western societies. However, Soviet ideological atheism is, by its nature fundamentally different from Western forms of atheism. It is not only opposed to theism: but also to ideological indifferentism and philosophical agnosticism in the religious sphere. Soviet atheism is a conscious and categorical negation of religious belief. Soviet atheism considers Western pragmatic and philosophical atheism – or ‘bourgeois atheism’ as it is called – to be deficient forms of atheism, whereas it sees itself as the full, the ‘highest degree’ of atheism.

So, although atheism is a general phenomenon in modern world, Soviet ideological atheism cannot be seen simply as a spontaneous consequence of modern secularization. On the one hand, the natural process of secularization is reinforced in Soviet society by the teaching in schools and universities of a conscious atheism, on the other hand, the propagating of this categorical atheism is the opposite of secularization. Real secularization in the Soviet Union would mean the abandonment of the systematical atheism and the acceptance of a neutral or indifferent attitude towards theism and religion. But that would open the way to ‘de-ideologization’ or ideological pluralism, which goes against the fundamentals of the Soviet political system.

This leads to a second feature of Soviet atheism: its dependance on the state or ruling power which defends and promotes atheism. It does not follow from the constitutional separation of church and state in the Soviet Union that the state adopts a neutral position towards church and religion. The state tolerates the church as a cult-organization and recognises the “freedom to per-

form religious rites". At the same time, it attacks religion as *Weltanschauung* by means of its educational system and media-monopoly. The state provides its citizens with an alternative world outlook, which is explicitly intended to replace the religious one. The commitment of state institutions to atheist propaganda gives Soviet atheism, in addition to its ideological character, a clear political or etatistic dimension. This makes it all the more distinct from varieties of atheism in the West, where political leaders, being themselves non-religious, do not see it as a governmental task to promote atheism.

The present study analyses the ideological and political nature of Soviet atheism. It is therefore, not a history of atheist propaganda in the Soviet Union (although there is a historical overview in Chapter IV). Nor is it a *religionswissenschaftlich* content-analysis of Marxist-Leninist atheism (the term 'Marxist' does not play an important role in the study). And finally, it is not a theological criticism of Soviet atheism. All these aspects have been dealt with in recent studies: a history of pre-war Soviet atheism is given by A. Burg; an approach to Soviet atheism from the field of religious studies by J. Thrower (upon which I shall comment later in this book); and a theological attempt to dialogue with Soviet atheism is the study of B. Groth. The most recent study by D. Pospelovsky came too late for consideration.¹

Whilst acknowledging my belief in God, I have neither criticized nor attempted to evaluate Soviet atheism from a religious standpoint. The book is a socio-political study and contains a meta-ideological criticism of Soviet atheism, which can be underwritten by adherents of Western philosophical atheism and agnosticism.

The study was completed in 1985 and published as articles in various journals. Since 1985, important changes have taken place in the Soviet Union: also in the field of ideology. Soviet writers and scientists have criticized dogmatism in various ideological areas: even in the field of atheism. The new policy of party-leader Mikhail Gorbachev has led to a more tolerant

attitude towards religion and to substantially better relations between the state and Russian Orthodox Church. Much of the criticism of Soviet religious policy, as formulated in this book, can be found now in the Soviet media themselves. This fact not only gives the part of the book which deals with "modern" Soviet society historical rather than topical significance, but it also means that this criticism has been recognized to be correct. However, as far as the *theory* of Soviet atheism is concerned, this has not been changed. Soviet atheism has not given up its ideological conditioning and its categorical nature nor its role in political socialization, which are the main themes of analysis in this book. Alongside the positive changes in Soviet policy towards religion, the professional *antireligiozniki* are continuing their struggle against religious philosophy and anthropology in general and against bible and christian churches in particular.

In the last two sections of the book a description is given of the developments in Soviet religious policy during the first two years of *perestrojka* and of atheist propaganda against the Russian Orthodox Church on the eve of its thousandth anniversary. It is too early to establish definite conclusions about the new Soviet political attitude towards religion and the continuing old ideological struggle against religious belief. I would be glad to see the analysis in this book overtaken by further positive developments in Soviet society.

Finally, a practical remark on transliteration of the Cyrillic alphabet. Russian words and titles have been transliterated in the internationally accepted library transliteration. Personal names in the notes and the bibliography also conform to this system. In the main text of the book, however, Russian personal names follow the popular English transliteration. This facilitates the reading process for those who are not familiar with the Russian language.

Note

1. A. Burg (1985); J. Thrower (1983); B. Groth (1986); D. Pospelovsky (1987).

Ideology and State

1. What is Soviet ideology?

Modern political science disputes the place of ideology in the Soviet political system. This problematic aspect of Soviet ideology is as much the result of analytical intangibility and the impossibility of quantifying the ideological factor in the process of political decision making – as of specific Western unfamiliarity with the nature of Soviet ideology. It is often assumed in the West that the Soviet Union is on the way to becoming a pragmatic state and that official ideology only has an incidental, propaganda function in the political system. Others believe that the extent to which ideology in the Soviet Union does play a decisive role is no more and no less than the degree to which ‘bourgeois’ ideology influences Western policy. Such convictions expose a basic misconception of the Soviet socio-political system and the character of Soviet communist ideology. That ideology is an important factor in the Soviet Union: it has a clearly traceable influence on political decision making and the ordering of society. Soviet ideology is not to be likened to such latent and open ideologies as exist in the West. It differs both in terms of its position in society and its totality as *Weltanschauung*. This chapter will examine the position of ideology in the Soviet system, and the next will deal with aspects of its status as *Weltanschauung*.

Soviet ideology is often identified with Marxism, that is with dialectical-materialistic philosophy and historical-materialistic social theory. However, care should be taken to interpret current Soviet ideology in terms of statism rather than those of philosophy and social science. Under the Soviet variant, such philosophical

critique and scientific value as was originally present in Marxism, has been converted into a system of statist values.

Soviet ideology is a state ideology, a doctrine on the state, interpreted by the state, with the interests of state as universal yardstick. Soviet ideology is the expression of the highest form of statism, the justification of a political system which recognizes no external assessment criteria. Ideological content is totally attuned to its role as state doctrine. Its informative function lies in the justification of state politics; its emotive function is to create a bond between citizens and state (patriotism); and its imperative function is the prevention and combating of anti-state activities. In the Soviet Union one is not judged politically on knowledge of Marxism but on loyalty to the state. Neither is one condemned for being anti-Marxist but for being anti-Soviet. For citizen and state alike ideology is not primarily a system of philosophical truths or scientific values to be accepted and believed. Rather it is, first and foremost, a system of behavioural rules, of standardized social dealings and political conduct. Personal indifference or scepticism towards the ideology, or mere opportunistic acceptance make it no less socially relevant.

For an accurate evaluation of ideology in Soviet society we need to consider the possible split between a citizen's personal disbelief and his public acceptance and behaviour. This peculiarity marks out Soviet ideology from those in the West where the ideology of a political party is a matter for personal conviction or preference. Western authors' underestimation of the ideological factor in Soviet politics is in part thanks to an underestimation of this split. The objective role of ideology in Soviet society is not dependent on the subjective agreement or disagreement of members of that society. The government wants to see 99% of the population vote for the ideology. And as long as that happens the inner thoughts of the electorate are politically irrelevant and no threat to the system. That is not to say that government does not try to make ideological values the citizen's

personal set of values. It attempts to bridge the gap both purposely and purposefully, but more of this, in detail, later. At this point it is enough to say that the individual's separation of personal and public value systems does not mean that ideology is any less influential in society.¹

A second source of misunderstanding concerning the role of ideology in Soviet society lies in the gap between theory and practice — the unrealistic pretensions of the ideology and its political usefulness. Non-achievement of its pretensions or ideals should not be seen as lessening ideology's role in society. Ideology is always justification and legitimization of political practice. It is tautologous to say that ideology in the Soviet Union is but a rationalization of politics. This fact in itself is not decisive in the evaluation of Soviet ideology: what is decisive is the manner in which rationalization occurs, and the means employed. The ideology is able to exercise its rationalizing function — to maintain itself — with means quite opposed to its formal ideals. This seeming contradiction goes to show the importance those in political power attach to the maintenance of the ideology. The ideology forfeits nothing of its import or authenticity through the rationalizing function. It is in the Soviet Union that one finds this function of ideology at its most refined. Even so, one can become confused by the verbal dream world conjured up by the very nature of the phenomenon ideology.

In short, we can say that assessment of the ideological character of Soviet politics does not concern whether or not those politics represent the correct practice of Marxist theory. Our starting point must be that ideology as formulated and practised by the Soviet leadership: *Real-Marxism*, Marxism made operational to the point of becoming Soviet state ideology.

2. The ideological monoculture

The statist character of Soviet ideology lies not only in its application to the interests of the state, but also in its functional dependence on state and party apparatus. Soviet ideology is maintained as a state ideology by political forces. The fate Marxism has suffered in the Soviet Union is the fate of each and every doctrine as soon as it is accorded ruling status: it becomes structurally interwoven with the power structure, the one reinforces the other. The dilemma of ideology or power politics often suggested in the West is a false dilemma: it is not a question of either one or the other, but of ideology due to power policies, or what amounts to the same thing, power politics due to ideology: the sequence is in fact the problem of the chicken and the egg.

The ruling power in the Soviet Union is at the same time the doctrinal authority of ideology. This is the hallmark of Soviet ideology — this is what marks it out from Western ideologies whose authority rests on the persuasive power of their advocates and endorsement by their followers. And thus it also differs from a scientific theory which is valid only as long as it does not clash with the facts. The validity of Soviet ideology is not decided by scientific argument but by legislation penalizing unauthorized interpretations; not by objective facts but by the official version of history which adapts the facts.

Doctrinal authority in the form of the ruling Communist party is politically inviolate. The party leader can be disqualified, but the party as a collective organ is always in the right — even if it had supported the ex-leader unanimously. The disqualification of a leader is not engineered from below on the basis of individual members' criticism but from above by the new leadership.

In the Soviet Union the current application of the ideology can be judged only by the political authority, and it is this very

conjunction of political and ideological authority which makes the Soviet Union an ideological monoculture. The Soviet Union is neither a pluralistic democracy nor a run-of-the-mill dictatorship, nor yet a traditional autocracy. An ideological monoculture resists a whole range of phenomena: pragmatic explanation of its politics; a neutral presentation of news; objectivity in the social sciences; autonomy of art; the independence of the church; an independent judiciary; a neutral stance of the citizen towards the state. The Soviet Union's ideological monoculture is a modern secular variant of a theocracy. Under neither system are the powers of politics and *Weltanschauung* separated.

Clearly, ideology occupies a central position in the Soviet political system. Without that ideology, the Soviet Union would not be what it is today and could not survive in its present form. Even so, the label 'ideocracy', often used of the Soviet system in the past, is misleading. It was based on an evaluation of ideological content, a recognition of ideological idealism as motivator. The evaluation was based on the assumption that government and the governed actually believed in and personally accepted the doctrine: politics were seen as an attempt to implement ideology. However, in the Soviet Union today, ideology no longer exists by virtue of inherent strength, political attraction or economic effectiveness – but because the leadership has become dependent on it to justify their power.

Maintenance of ideology rather than the propagation of its ideals is their primary goal. No longer does ideology rule by force of the promises it makes. It is kept going artificially, cultivated by means of power. This is no ideocracy but an ideological monoculture. Qualifying it as such avoids not only the overestimation of the ideology in the old ideocratic interpretation model but also the underestimation of the ideological factor in many contemporary institutional-analytical studies of the Soviet Union. The latter is based on a negative content judgement: political reality is seen not to correspond with

ideological theory; and the erroneous conclusion is drawn that ideology plays no part in decision making. Taking the protection of ideology, the cultivation of the doctrine, as the axis of Soviet politics avoids the subjective evaluation of ideology as practiced. The interpretation model of Soviet society as ideological monoculture makes no explicit qualitative judgement on content. Implicitly it does demonstrate the opinion of the researcher that the ideology has become a doctrinal dead-letter, but nevertheless recognizes its continuing political role.

3. Statism and atheism

By its very nature, Soviet ideology's statist system of values aims at a spiritual monopoly of society. Toleration of competing ideologies as equals is politically, ethically, and from the point of *Weltanschauung* out of the question. Such toleration would imply ideological pluralism and undermine the foundations of the Soviet political system. Even so, the state monopoly is challenged by two non-state ideological value systems: nationalism in certain Soviet republics, and religion.

National consciousness in, for example, the Baltic republics, the Ukraine and central Asian republics put inherited, pre-Soviet, non-communist values first, and in so doing they threaten the official state and corrode its ideology. This applies not only to nationalism of the smaller nationalities in the Soviet Union but also to ethnic Russian nationalism which is by no means the same as Soviet statism. The emotional expression of the latter is 'Soviet patriotism', Russian nationalism is a different phenomenon. Just as the culture and past of other Soviet peoples are subject to the norms of Soviet ideology and communist reinterpretation, so too is Russian culture and historical identity. Similarities

between pre and post revolutionary foreign policies do not mean that Russian nationalism is the ideology of Soviet leadership. Neither does the preferential official status of the Russian language save it from the common take of other languages spoken in the Soviet Union – suffocation under ideological artificiality.² Sovietization and not Russification is the rule for all, including Russians, albeit that they undergo the process at the hands of their own leaders.

Nationalism is doubly dangerous when allied to religion such as Roman Catholicism in Lithuania and Orthodoxy in Russia and Islam in Central Asia. But religion is not only a threat to the Soviet state as a conductor of nationalism. Even stripped of its political function religion clashes with the Soviet ideological monoculture. Religion imposes limits on the all-embracing statism of Soviet ideology and challenges the monopoly the state has on the *Weltanschauung* of the citizen. Religion places God above the state.

However, belief in God, theism, is not the chief cause of friction between religion and Soviet ideology. The fundamental tension occurs because of the vision of man and religious ethics. Under Soviet ideological standards the ethical limits of political behaviour are set by interests of state and not by the conscience – be it religiously based or not – of the citizen. As these interests are defined by those with the right to interpret ideology, namely the political leadership, they too define the choice of means. The state leadership, in addition to being the highest doctrinal authority becomes the highest moral authority in the land. The denial of ethical values above the state and of the individual citizen's right to an autonomous ethical conscience follows directly from the statist nature of the ideology. The ideological ethic degrades man to a political object, a citizen of the state – whereas the religious view of man emphasizes the value of the human person independently from his membership of a state.³ Personalism supercedes statism. The social thought arising from religious

anthropology also clashes with Soviet ideology: it crosses ideological and political barriers, teaches forgiveness towards enemies, and attempts to bridge class antagonism without violence.

Against the political 'objectivisation' of man by statist ideologies, religion – and philosophic humanism with roots in religion – upholds the uniqueness of the human being, his conscience, and his spiritual autonomy. And so, the Soviet ideology turns against this personalized vision of man in its struggle against religion and religious anthropology. Atheism in the Soviet ideology is above all 'apersonalism': the first is theory, the second is practice.

Combating the religious outlook on life is an intrinsic necessity for Soviet ideology, and therefore independent of the political position of church authorities. Even when these and their communities have declared political loyalty to the state, their beliefs are routinely attacked in atheist propaganda and the practice of their religion hindered. The political authorities continue to see religion as an ideological *Fremdkörper*, a philosophy hindering the final establishment of communism. The government's organizational concessions made to the church authorities should not be seen as an acceptance of religion in principle – quite the opposite, the pacified church leaders are being used in the struggle against religion. They may not protest against the ban on religious instruction – or religious propaganda as it is called – nor against sentencing of the faithful for distributing religious literature, nor yet against the closing of church buildings.

Its rejection of religion as a matter of principle coupled with active propaganda against religion makes the Soviet ideology unique among modern ideologies. Neither democratic socialism, nor liberalism, nor Western communism have this ideological need. Western society may be highly secular but is not anti-religious. It neither strives nor hopes for the disappearance of religion in society.

In the Soviet Union, elimination of religion is part of the

Communist Party's long term programme and realization is attempted with the help of the state political apparatus. This political dimension marks the divide between Soviet atheism and Western atheism, 'bourgeois' atheism in Soviet terms, which is criticized for being nothing more than a purely theoretical negation of God. To the Soviet view, it lacks active anti-religious propaganda and the legislative measures to limit church activities. But Soviet ideology does even more than combat religion, it provides a replacement *Weltanschauung* and creates a new socialist spiritual culture. Religion must be replaced by materialistic philosophy and communist equivalents take the place of religious feast days and rites; and, in historiography, the past must be purged of over-emphasis on the role of religion in the birth of Russian, Baltic, Ukrainian and Islamic culture.⁴ Soviet ideology wants to fill the vacuum created in society and men's minds with a new religion. The next chapter delves deeper into ideology as ersatz religion in the Soviet Union.

Notes

1. In social science, the contrast between thought and political behaviour, is known as the contrast between 'political value system' or 'political belief' and 'political behaviour'. The problem of transfer of ideological values in the Soviet Union is not simply a problem of belief or unbelief. Analysis of the effect of ideology on attitudes of individual citizens demands a socio-psychological study beyond the terms of reference of this book. Suffice it here to quote A. Zinov'ev (1978), 170-171, by way of illustration: "It only seems as if our ideology leaves the human soul untouched or only summons up scepticism and contempt. The very fact of its existence and functioning means the ideology has a formal apparatus to penetrate to the human soul – independent of every substantial ideological concreteness. In an unfathomable manner, this apparatus weaves the finest of meshes into the human conscious".

2. Although S. White (1979) also points to the many ways in which ideology influences political culture in the Soviet Union, he completely ignores its influence on language. What he does have to say on the matter, on pages 85-86, is that the ideology has given Russian a number of new children's names (Marlen, Ninel) and a new mode of address (comrade). But this is irrelevant seen against the far-reaching semantic and lexicographic influence of the ideology on Russian, and a serious underestimation of the role of the language in the process of political socialization.
3. M. Heller (1979), 208.
4. M. Zoc (1984).

Ideology and *Weltanschauung*

1. The Soviet concept of ideology

Having dealt with the place of ideology in the Soviet political system, we pass on to special properties, the structural characteristics of Soviet ideology. We do not cover the content of Marxism-Leninism, dialectical materialism and communist social doctrine, we confine ourselves to the turn of the intellectual framework and emotive expression of the ideology. Elements of content will be discussed as far as their *Weltanschauung* function and social scope are concerned rather than examined for theoretical tenability.

The first point deserving mention is the very concept of ideology and the Soviet understanding thereof. The term is used in a variety of ways with a variety of connotations. Today, we would call the original, etymologically clear definition – ‘the science of ideas’, ‘the science by which ideas originate in human thought processes’ – meta-ideological. This meaning of the term was introduced in 1803 by the French philosopher, Destutt De Tracy in his *Eléments d'idéologie* and as such had a neutral connotation. He wrote that just as zoology exists so does ideology, a science which systematically studies the laws of thought and the formation of ideas. It was political circumstance, and not scientific criticism which gave the term a negative flavour. The liberal ideas De Tracy expressed both as philosopher of Enlightenment and member of the senate clashed with dictatorship. In 1812 the Emperor Napoleon, in an address to the council of state, attributed the unhealthy political atmosphere to ‘idéologues’ and their ‘idéologie’. The term was politicized and disqualified at a stroke.¹

Marx and Engels also use the word in a negative sense to describe an abstract manner of philosophizing – particularly as practiced by the young-Hegelians. They regarded ideology as an idealistic philosophy, philosophizing from ideas, metaphysics. ‘Ideological thinking’, as such, stands opposed to the historic-materialistic interpretation of thought.² In a derivative sense, ideology is used both for the idealistic method of philosophizing and the entire gamut of resultant philosophic, religious and political concepts. Given that these are bourgeois concepts, ideological thinking is by definition an occupation for the exploiting class. This class factor adds extra negative meaning to the original concept.

a. Ideology and science Despite Marx and Engels’ rejection of the concept, the Soviet interpretation of Marxism gives ideology a positive meaning. Lenin developed the class factor but went further – workers’ thought also came under the heading of ideology. Lenin talked of proletarian, socialist and scientific ideology in direct contrast to the bourgeois ideology. In *What is to be done?* he stated that thought is impossible outside these options: “either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle way – mankind has created no ‘third’ ideology, just as in a society divided by class no ideology can exist which ignores class – and so, every dilution of socialist ideology, every deviation, automatically reinforces bourgeois ideology.”³ Shortly before writing this Lenin made an equation in the 1st February 1902 issue of the Party organ *Iskra* “proletarian ideology, the teaching of scientific socialism – that is to say Marxism”. Interestingly, though Marx had actually rejected the term ‘Marxism’, Lenin promoted this ‘ism’ to the status of ideology. Lenin’s teachings were likewise posthumously systematized to an ‘ism’. While Lenin still lived, Leninism enjoyed only pejorative usage by critics. In 1925 the combination ‘Marxo-Leninism’ was used for the first time, in the mid-1930s ‘Marxism-Leninism’ became inextricably en-

twined.⁴ In the Soviet Union one no longer uses 'proletarian' as the qualifying adjective for the ideology: Marxism-Leninism now enjoys the undisputed status of being the 'only scientific ideology'.

Lenin had already said just that. Replying to Bogdanov's emphasis on the historical limitations of all ideologies Lenin admitted universal historical conditioning but went on to say that: "it is beyond dispute that every scientific ideology – unlike for instance a religion – refers to the objective truth and absolute nature".⁵ Hence, according to Lenin, the criterium for truth in human knowledge lies not on the dividing line between ideology and non-ideology but in the difference between true and false, scientific and unscientific, progressive and reactionary ideologies.

Lenin's usage established the Soviet concept of ideology; only once during the 1920s was any doubt expressed. An article in *Pod Znamenem Marksizma* by V. Adoratsky, editor-in-chief of the first collected works of Marx and Engels, declared his opposition to ideology and to 'ideologism'. "Marxism", he wrote, "is the enemy of ideology thought infected by ideologism cannot be scientific. Science is one thing, ideology is another."⁶ And herewith, as far as the Soviet Union was concerned, the discussion was closed for many years. During the 60s and 70s Western philosophic development, particular in the Frankfurt school, prompted new publications on the concept of ideology of which M. Yakovlev's, *Ideologija* was a prime example.⁷ After an extensive presentation of the orthodox view, the book surveys various Western ideas on ideology in the manner of a philosophic philippic against K. Mannheim, M. Scheler, K. Popper, H. Albert, Th. Geiger, E. Lemberg, E. Topitsch, K. Lenk, Th. Adorno, J. Habermas and L. Kolakowski – indeed any and all thinkers who had ever dealt critically with the concept of ideology – all the differing opinions being lumped together. The method of argumentation is well known – frequent quotes from Lenin supported by Brezhnev – used as proofs against all-comers. This, in itself,

speaks volumes more than the lapidary style and total imperviousness to scientific criticism. Soviet leaders, rather than Soviet philosophers, are ranged against the Western authors. This is characteristic for the status of Marxism in the Soviet Union. Despite the oft repeated official claim that Marxism is not a dogmatic school and demands constant creative development, Lenin was the last Soviet Marxist thinker to have won a place, at home or abroad, in Marxist tradition. It appears that the closer the ideological system the less potential for discussion: never-ending discussion in the West, starting with Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* in 1929 and the sociology of knowledge it develops, indicates the opposite – as natural consequence of the absence of a closed ideology.

Mannheim states that all knowledge is ideologically distorted by its 'bond of being', the dependence of human consciousness on the observer's standpoint, all knowledge being limited by perspective and necessarily incomplete. The ideological perspective in class based thought is merely a particular expression of general distortion in man's perception of his world. To Mannheim, ideology and science are mutually incompatible. Post Mannheim debate has narrowed the concept of ideology, but the tension with science remains in the various epistemological schools. And this is precisely where a significant difference occurs between Western and Soviet philosophical outlooks on ideology. What for the West is an epistemological quadrature of the circle, in the East becomes a dialectic sublimation of the antithesis, namely scientific ideology. Leninism is the synthesis of class subjectivity and scientific objectivity, communist partisanship and historical laws. For the Soviet school any other solution to the dilemma can only lead to relativism (all thought is fixed ideologically and objective science is thus impossible), or idealism (separation of scientific thinking from class links). In the Soviet view, the latter represents the fundamental fault common to all Western schools – Frankfurt neo-Marxism and the rest of the critical Marxist varieties

included — all being infected with idealistic philosophic methods. Soviet philosophy is confident that it has escaped idealism — abstract thought unconnected with social reality — via dialectic materialism, without having fallen into another pitfall, mechanical materialism, economism, or fatalism. Even so, whilst Marxism-Leninism recognizes ‘a relative autonomy’ of thought, allowing that not all science, philosophy or art can be directly explained via socio-economic factors, there is far reaching rejection of the idea of neutral science. Thus Soviet terminology talks of ‘concrete’ rather than ‘empirical’ sociology which would imply that socio-scientific research can be strictly factual without ideological premises. So, natural sciences are seen as “an arena of ideological struggle in that the philosophic — *Weltanschauung* conclusions based on their results are ideological in character”.⁸

b. Ideology and politics In the Soviet concept of ideology there is an aspect in addition to the scientific, namely practical orientation — activism. Not only is ideology scientific but vice versa: true knowledge of reality stimulates an active political attitude in that reality.

The connection of ideology and politics is obvious from the unity of theory and practice, and is essential for a state ideology. The political organs of the Soviet Union themselves constantly emphasize the ideological *idejnost*’ of their policy by referring to or quoting Lenin. Here too there is a noticeable difference with Western ideology and politics. A Western government would never trumpet the ideological content of its policies nor see pragmatism as a loss of identity. Western politicians talk about certain principles which they regard as the foundations and aims of their politics — freedom, democracy, pluralism and so on. However this is no explicit doctrinal action plan nor a pre-packaged, ready-for-use ideological guidance system. The point is an important one, not for reasons of polemics, but because such comparisons are the best way to clarify the special properties

of Soviet ideology. Ideology and general political principles are not to be equated and do not result in comparable political situations. Soviet ideology has an institutionalized status with an apparatus of education from Higher Party School to local agitator, and a party control network at all political administrative levels. 'Ideological struggle' against 'alien ideologies' and rejection of 'ideological pluralism or convergence' also characterize ideologically based politics.

c. Ideology and *Weltanschauung* The Soviet concept of ideology goes further than linking ideology to science and politics. Ideology is also a *mirovozzrenie*, a *Weltanschauung*, a philosophy of life, explaining the lot of mankind, the purpose of existence and the meaning of evil. As well as being a blueprint for society it also provides for a new philosophic anthropology and ontology. These claims, going far beyond practical politics and social science, have given Soviet ideology its totalistic or holistic character. The idea that society and intellectual life can be analysed and changed from a single starting point was already there in Marx's historical materialism with its economical determinism. However, radical and consistent implementation of this holistic aspect of Marxism had to wait for Soviet ideology. The significance of this totality is confirmed by the emphasis in ideological textbooks to the fact that this is just what makes Soviet ideology superior to every other philosophy and school of thought. 'Complete', 'integral', 'one' and 'harmonious' refer to this totality in the established terminology. For example, the book *Foundations of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy* opens as follows: "Marxism-Leninism forms a complete (*celostnyj*), harmonious (*strojnyj*) doctrine, its three constituents – philosophy, political economy and theory of scientific communism – are inextricably linked . . . The harmony (*strojnost'*), the completeness (*celostnost'*), the iron logic and the consistency of Marxism-Leninism, which even opponents recognize, results from the application in all

its constituents of the one (*jedinyj*) philosophic dialectical-materialistic Weltanschauung and method.”⁹ According to the handbook *Scientific Communism*: “Marxism-Leninism is a complete (*celostnyj*) doctrine, an integral (*cel’nyj*) and harmonious, (*strojnyj*) system of mutually complementary philosophic, economic and socio-political views . . . Every attempt by revisionists to break this one (*jedinyj*) doctrine and to set each component against the other means an attack on Marxism-Leninism”.¹⁰

The totalistic outlook of the ideology also prescribes its systematic nature. Soviet ideology is an inter-connected whole of political, economic, legal, moral, artistic, and philosophical views and beliefs, with the appropriate complex of behavioural norms, value judgements and feelings. It has an informative, imperative and emotive function, and so guides thought, deed and spirit of the citizen. We shall now further examine the function of Soviet ideology as *Weltanschauung*.

2. The difference with civil religion

We have seen that Soviet ideology is more than a political action-plan, it represents a comprehensive outlook on the world, a way of life in which the political programme is only a component. World outlooks differ in character, they can be religious or philosophic: Soviet ideology is neither, it is a unique combination of the two – a religiomorphic philosophy or a secular religion. An outlook based on religion or philosophy acts as spiritual signpost, showing man his place in society and history; in so doing philosophy works within the bounds of reason, religion can call on an additional repository of knowledge, the experience of belief. In a world outlook, the reason-belief division is never absolute. The religious outlook also uses reasoned argument

(religious philosophy), and a philosophy has its axiomatic principles (philosophic ethics). The interpretation of being provided by philosophy is never unambiguously verifiable or open to falsification. Hence a self-respecting philosophy begins by recognizing that concepts of objectivity and rationality are relative, so establishing anti-dogmatic pedigree. This scientific reserve is present in ontology, the branch concerned with the explanation of being, its presence is even more marked in anthropological philosophy. There are no pre-packed, scientific answers to mankind's existential questioning on the meaning of life and suffering. The need for philosophic clarity and existential security leads to answers part-determined by pre-scientific and, in the widest sense, emotional factors. Man's outlook on life is a complex whole: a 'scientific outlook' is a contradiction in terms, i.e. here science has the pretensions of scientism. It is also a redundancy. There is nothing wrong with an 'unscientific' outlook on life, on the contrary, such is the authentic expression of fundamental human ambiguity.

This relativism is quite strange to Soviet ideology with its belief in science. In the fierce belief in the irrefutability of its founding principles lies the first similarity with religion where this belief is called dogmatism. No one would advance belief in dogmas as a proof of inherent contradiction in religion, such constitutes the nature of religion. But, when a world outlook, which sees itself as the very opposite of religion, turns out to have a religious or theological pattern of thought, then there is clearly something of a contradiction. One could even say that in the area of dogma Soviet ideology is more extreme than a religion, precisely because of its emphatic pretensions to being not only a scientific but the *only* scientific world outlook. At a certain moment one sees in Soviet ideology the selfsame fundamental clash between critical reason and doctrinal authority as occurs in theology. When doctrine wins, hypotheses become dogmas. Scientific philosophizing is permitted in Soviet ideology but

within bounds: founding principles of the ideology may not be put in doubt. Similarly in theology, scientific reflexion is based on the established basic articles of faith.

There are more analogies between Soviet ideological and religious attitudes, quite enough to characterize Soviet ideology as a reliptomorphous philosophy or secular religion. Before examining these in detail, the concept of a secular religion requires clarification. Secular religion is not the same as 'civil religion', a term originally used to designate the U.S. ideological value system.¹¹ U.S. civil religion is a mixture of Christian values and political ideals. The term can be applied to other forms of national consciousness where religious belief and politics interact, as in Israel. The belief component, be it Christian, Jewish or Islamic, is visible after integration into the national political value system. A theocracy such as Iran is another matter, there the religion takes the place of politics. Under civil religion there is no complete identification of religion and politics. There may be only historical or symbolic traces of religion as in Britain where the Sovereign is titular head of the Church of England. Expression often comes in title and politics of certain parties, e.g. European Christian Democrats. Civil religion recognizes the practical division of church and state but religious faith plays a political role via the commitment of individual citizens. In Communist ideology, Marxism-Leninism, and in Soviet national consciousness there is no question of adopting Christian or other religious values. Karl Marx's roots in the Judaic-Messianic tradition are often cited as explanation for religious elements in the ideology to which he gave his name. Others would have it that Marxism is actually the social element of Christian doctrine in ideal form. Marx made no such admissions or claims and openly declared himself against both Judaism and Christianity. Naturally, this does not rule out any subconscious cultural influence; but if Marx did carry some Judeo-Christian intellectual baggage, Lenin most certainly did not. If there were any religious heirlooms

in Marxism, Lenin, with his hearty detestation for anything of the sort, ferretted them out.

There is no interaction between religion and politics in the Soviet Union, but political ideology strives to replace traditional religion in society and man's mind. Political ideology has become an ersatz religion, a secular faith lacking the transcendental dimension of theistic religion but with the function, the claims, the framework of thought and ritual display of the latter. In short, a secular religion is a political ideology with the functional and formal characteristics of a conventional religion.

3. Religiomorphous aspects of the ideology

Many authors have remarked on the analogies in intellectual structure, ritualistic expression and outward organization between Soviet communism and religion. The quasi-religious character of Soviet communist ideology is the major common denominator in many critical analyses of communism. Indeed the basic similarities are too striking to go unremarked; almost automatically one uses the language of theology and religious phenomenology to describe communist thought: dogmatic, gnostic, eschatological, manichaeic, soteriological, messianistic, missionary and ritualistic.

The similarity can also be described in Marxist terms. Indeed, Marx's own definition of a religion in *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie* could equally well apply to Soviet ideology: "Die Religion ist die allgemeine Theorie dieser Welt, ihr enzyklopädische Kompendium, ihre Logik in populärer Form, ihr spiritua-listischer Point d' honneur, ihr Enthusiasmus, ihre moralische Sanktion, ihre feierliche Ergänzung, ihr allgemeiner Trost — und Rechtfertigungsgrund. Sie ist die *phantastische Verwirklichung*

des menschlichen Wesens, weil das *menschliche Wesen* keine wahre Wirklichkeit besitzt".¹² This is all very well, but precise argument requires more than hoisting Marxist definitions with their own petard: not because it is unfair to turn Marxist criticism on Marxism itself but because the definition of religion is faulty. Nevertheless, criticism of the ideology as pseudo-religion cuts two ways — religion could just as well be accused of having an ideological character. In this sense the original Marxian criticism of religion's ideological degeneration into a doctrine justifying power is as valid as the accusation that Marxist ideology seeks to replace religion.

Their similarity can also be used to disqualify both religion and Soviet ideology as equal anachronisms, irrelevant to modern intellectual freedom: communism and Roman Catholicism can thus be bracketed and compared for attitudes on authority, monopoly of truth, methods of propaganda and techniques of social control.¹³ In fact only the last two aspects are in any way common and capable of empirical comparison.

There is a fourth and final option in the comparison of ideology and religion. It can be demonstrated that both cover fundamental human needs: man, lacking religion, inevitably creates a compensatory ideological outlook on life. Criticism of the one is born out of preference for the other, or as is the case in the Soviet Union, out of the desire of one to replace the other. But, if ideology wants to take over the function of religion, some reproach it directs at religion must rebound. Here is the inbuilt contradiction of Soviet ideology, a contradiction made visible by structural comparison with religion.

As previously noted, many authors have remarked on the religious character of communism: Marxist theoreticians, social scientists and philosophers from Hendrik de Man to Herbert Marcuse, from Joseph Schumpeter to Raymond Aron and from Nicolai Berdyayev to Bertrand Russell. In every case the comparison is used critically to demonstrate communism's unjustified

claims as *Weltanschauung*. However, shortly after the turn of the century a group of Russian Marxists who were to go down in history as the 'god-builders' (*bogostroiteli*) from their concept of socialism as 'god-building' (*bogostroitel'stvo*), welcomed and actively propagated the idea of ideology as religion. Maxim Gorky was in the forefront of the movement together with the cultural critic, later People's Commissar for Education, Anatoli Lunacharsky and the Marxist theoretician, Alexander Bogdanov. Clearly the religious interpretation of scientific socialism presupposes a new interpretation of the concept of religion – but most interesting about this school was its positive evaluation of the phenomenon and consequent desire to put Marxism in a religious framework. Whilst seeing religion as the expression of fundamental human endeavour and ambition, the god-builders would have it that only the religion of socialism can bring real fulfilment. Every theism is thus rejected, the new religion is humanistic, a Promethean cult of man who rather than seeking god in the world must create him, "build him" via the creation of a new society. Gorky first coined the term in *Ispoved'* (The Confession), a novel published in 1908; he meant 'god-building as counterpart for the then current 'god-seeking' (*bogoiskatel'stvo*), denoting a group for the renewal of Russian christianity which included Shestov, Berdyayev and S. Bulgakov. *The Confession* provoked an immediate and widespread furor, not so much for its literary qualities, which had suffered considerably from the author's didactic enthusiasm, but on grounds of content.¹⁴ The novel was an attack on a God who allows suffering, a humiliation of Russian monasticism and a homage to a people in travail. Reactions ranged from 'blasphemy' to 'evangelism of the proletariat'. A contemporary called its philosophy '... a somewhat uneasy combination of pantheism, religious anthropology and undefined socialist endeavour'. The latter is certainly true, socialist motivation is clear and prominent, though Marxist terminology is absent. There is no mention of the working class or proletariat,

only of *narod* or *naroduško*, a permanent theme in Gorki's work. The novel glorifies the collective power of the people and belief in their own potential – having first described how uncultured they are. The people must realize their own divine power: "God was not created by man's weakness, no, he was born of an excess of strength. And, brothers, he lives not outside – but in us".

This consciousness of an own divine power is no pantheism; the community – the people – and not nature is deified. It is, as another contemporary called it, 'demotheism', but then as the final stage of humanity. According to Gorky, the deification of man began with Christ, "the first true people's god . . . at whose birth awareness was born in the people of the necessity of the equality of mankind". Elsewhere he has the preacher of the new god say: "The god of whom I speak came when the united people created him from the material of their spirits, to lighten the darkness of their existence; but when the people divided into slaves and rulers, in bits and pieces, when they tore their spirit and will asunder, then god fell, then he was destroyed . . . The greatest crime of those who ruled life was the destruction of the creative power of the people. The time shall come when the entire will of the people will once again unite at a single point; at that moment an invincible and wondrous power will be born, a god will rise again!"

To Gorky, religious metaphor and symbolism were in the main a means of literary expression. It was Anatoli Lunacharsky who first elaborated the theory of god-building in his *Religija i Socializm*, (Religion and Socialism), also published in 1908.¹⁵ Lunacharsky's religious-philosophical explanation of socialism links up with A. Bogdanov's critical interpretation of Marxism which rejects Marx's one-sided, economic-materialistic view of history seeing the dynamic of history not in laws of matter, but in mankind's creative urge, in culture and science. Bogdanov developed a philosophic collectivism, a philosophy of collective experience alongside Marx's philosophic materialism. According

to Bogdanov, bourgeois dualism of individual and society was dispersed in humanity's collective consciousness which is linked to the creation of a new society and presented a real basis for belief in immortality.¹⁶

Lunacharsky felt that Marx had insufficiently emphasized the emotional aspects of socialist ideology and, as a result, that ideology failed to take sufficient account of actual human needs. He begins his book on religion as follows: "I have never taken Marxism as a dry economic theory . . . To my mind scientific socialism is firstly a synthetic philosophy crowning the greatest, deepest and most stimulating thoughts of Marx's preceptors — the great German idealists." Lunacharsky stressed the link between Marx and his idealistic predecessors, in particular Hegel, as this makes his philosophic-religious explanation possible. This puts him diametrically opposite Sergei Bulgakov who two years earlier, in a brochure published in Moscow entitled *Karl Marks kak Religioznyj Tip* (Karl Marx as Religious Type) had made the denial of every affinity between Marx and Hegel the main argument in his criticism of Marx. In a vehement argument, he demonstrates that Marx understood nothing of Hegel and that the prime motivation for his socialist philosophy was anti-religious. Lunacharsky does not refer to the brochure and only mentions Bulgakov in passing by calling another opponent, Berdyayev, 'Bulgakovized'.¹⁷

By dressing Marxism as a philosophy/outlook on life Lunacharsky tries to position it "in the fullness of man's relationship to the world . . . and to declare its aesthetic and religious values". The terms 'value', 'valuation', and 'meaning' crop up regularly in Lunacharsky's explanation of Marxism. Whilst he does not doubt the scientific integrity of the doctrine, that is but one aspect of the whole. He adopts Berdyayev's mode of posing the question: "According to Marx, socialism is socially inevitable, is it then necessarily a blessing? Socialism is a matter of class concern for the proletariat, but does it follow that it is a concern

of all mankind?”. At the same time he complains that Berdyayev’s answer, “will split Marxism by giving heaven the ideal and leaving earth with the realism of reform”.

He then goes on to explain the concept of religion, agreeing with Ludwig Feuerbach, whose theory on religion was an important inspiration for the god-builders’ view of humanity; they were better able to accept Feuerbach and judge him at his true value than Marx who used him as a springboard for total rejection of religion. The god-builders’ positive attitude towards certain aspects of religion are borrowed from Feuerbach’s central proposition: that the image of god in religion is the expression of man’s being, of his finest qualities and ideals; man has his own consciousness of immortality, his own creativity, desire for justice, love and knowledge projected in a god outside of his being: “Man created god in his own image”, and the divine characteristics are human characteristics. That is the truth of religion according to Feuerbach; its falsehood lies in mankind’s self-estrangement by creating a separate image of god. The division of god and man should be ended by adjusting theological qualifications of the former to fit the latter. “Theology is anthropology”, said Feuerbach. Lunacharsky and his followers also saw an individual’s immortality in his transcendation into mankind, but unlike Feuerbach they put mankind’s deification in the future: the ideal, perfect collective mankind will only be created as a result of social change and a new culture – only then will the human god be born. “god.” said Lunacharsky, “is mankind in its highest potency.”¹⁸

Lunacharsky’s book attacks such Marxist critics of religion as Plekhanov and Pannekoek who, rather than working from within like Feuerbach, assailed religion “with a battering ram, ridicule, and criticism of its anachronisms”. He quotes from Feuerbach’s book, *Das Wesen des Christentums*: “This book denies only the non-human essence of religion, but it recognizes and confirms its human essence”. Following this up in his own

words he says: "I think that Marx has been quite brilliant in his manner of promoting anthropology to the level of theology — by decisively helping human consciousness to become a religion of mankind."

Lunacharsky's second important source of inspiration for his outlook on socialism was the German social-democrat, Jozeph Dietzgen, a contemporary of Marx. Dietzgen was among the first to feel that Marxism was nearer religion than science — better said, a scientific religion. Lunacharsky deals extensively with his ideas, quoting from *Die Religion der Sozialdemokratie* in which Dietzgen writes of "a new religion to be accepted with not only heart but reason too . . . its aim is to revive the human heart, fatigued by earthly suffering. Hitherto the religion could only achieve this via the way of idealism by seeking refuge in dreams, by pointing to an invisible God and by promises. The gospel of the new religion promises to reform our vale of tears in the most real, effective and tangible manner."

Lunacharsky also makes victory over suffering and physical limitations an important theme in his praise of the socialist religion — this victory being the sole means of realizing the happiness for which mankind has always longed. He arrives at the following definition of religion: "religion is the ability to think and *feel* about the world in such a way that we do away with contradictions between the laws of life and nature. Scientific socialism solves these contradictions by propagating the idea of conquering life, of subjecting the force of nature to reason by knowledge and work, science and technique."

In common with the traditional, the new religion takes its point of departure from "mankind's basic needs . . . its eternal discontent"; much is owed to the older religions for having discerned and expressed those fundamental needs. But rather than preaching resignation, the new religion urges that fate be grasped in both hands. "Longing lives in man, he who cannot think of the world as religious is doomed to pessimism". Hope, prospects

and optimism form the new religion's message. Lunacharsky's book *Religion and Socialism* ends as follows: "Is the new religion only a dream? No, it is hope, a hope better founded than in any other religion. Hope can of course deceive, but even if mankind fails to gain victory and even if death shall ever await, the religion of labour will make for a splendid life and will expunge the well justified reproach that the religion hitherto gave its carressings to mankind for too high a price. The religion will be rationalized and purged but will lose nothing of its depth, victoriousness and stimulating beauty Religion, that is enthusiasm, 'and without enthusiasm mankind can never achieve greatness'."

There are two reasons why the god-builders' view on socialism, as given above, represent a noteworthy phenomenon in the history of Russian Marxism. Firstly, there is open recognition of ideology as religion-substitute; the god-builders offer a highly consistent, even fair, representation of things. In so doing they make the accusation that Marxism is a pseudo or crypto-religion and thus in contradiction to its official scientific nature — redundant¹⁹. Secondly, these pre-Soviet Marxists show how criticism of religion can differ from later Soviet criticism. Convinced fighters against theism, they may have been, but they were never blinded by hate for religion. They recognized the human values in religion and integrated them in their evaluation of socialism. They made no compromises on theism, there is nothing transcendental in their religion. Their convictions on immortality were based on trust in science: physical limitations would be solved but mankind would always be bounded by space and time.

The god-builders theory of socialism made little if any impression on the Bolsheviks. They were subject to immediate criticism by party organs and individual members. An extraordinary editorial meeting of the party paper, *The Proletarian*, in Paris in 1909, officially rejected "attempts to give scientific socialism the character of a religious belief";²⁰ Plekhanov was

particularly mocking²¹, and a few years later Lenin himself violently condemned their ideas (more of this in the next chapter, which deals with Lenin's attitude to religion).

Both Gorky and Lunacharsky bowed to the party line and dropped their ideas on the religious dimension of socialism. Lunacharsky committed self-criticism on various occasions, for the last time in a 1931 article dripping with self-accusation – *On Philosophic Discussions, 1908-1910*. He quotes a conversation with Lenin which clearly shows just what is wrong with the religious interpretation of Marxism: "What is most scandalous about your views is that you really think that you are honouring Marxism by calling it the greatest of religions and embellish it by using not only that most odious term religion but also, by various tricks of argumentation, the disgraceful word 'god'."²²

4. The intellectual structure

The question of degree of resemblance between communist ideology and religion is not totally answered by referring to the god-builders nor to Lenin's rejection of the question as such. One can point to a number of clear, formal signs which give Soviet communist ideology the air of a belief. These religio-morphous characteristics are found in the intellectual framework and emotive form of expression. The first category covers the the concept of truth (dogmatic aspect), the concept of history (eschatological aspect), and the doctrine of salvation (soteriological aspect).

a. The concept of truth Soviet ideology features a series of fundamental truths, such as the economic determination of history, class antagonism, the withering away of religion, the

certainty of communist destiny and the leading role of the party. Having been accepted in principle, these form the basis for further discussion and 'creative elaboration'. Soviet ideology has this dogmatic starting point in common with theological science, and both differ in this respect from science in general. Soviet ideology does not start from philosophic amazement, scientific doubt and natural scepticism towards pre-packaged answers for as yet unknown questions. Soviet ideology's concept of truth rests on the conviction that no post-Lenin scientific development can disprove the kernel of doctrine.

Although Soviet ideologists do not use theological terms like 'infallible' and 'eternal' to describe their truth, others equally incompatible with science are employed — 'definitive', 'highest' and 'only'. This absolute concept of truth is no product of critical reasoning which always admits the *conditional* validity of its statements; it comes much nearer the idea of a revelation, the manifestation of the absolute truth in human intellect at a given moment in history. This unique property is best designated as cognitive exclusivism. In fact it is an esoteric view of knowledge, gnosis.

The notion of Soviet ideology as a modern form of gnosis is dealt with in depth by the French cultural historian, Alain Besançon in *The Intellectual Origins of Leninism*.²³ In treating Leninist ideology as a kind of gnosis, Besançon simultaneously notes one point of divergence with religion: there is no act of faith in the ideology, no acknowledgement of the limits of human intellect, "At the basis of religions of faith there is a conscious unknown. Abraham, St John and Muhammed know that they do not know. They know that they believe. When Lenin declares that the materialist interpretation of history is not a hypothesis but a scientifically demonstrated doctrine, it is doubtless a belief, but a belief he imagins proven in experience. At the basis of the ideology lies something known. Lenin does not know that he believes. He believes that he knows." In the rest of his analysis

of Leninism Besançon concentrates on the epistemological aspect of the ideology: it is neither science nor philosophy nor religion alone: it is a hybrid or mixture of all three – a form of *gnosis* whose historical prototype is rooted in Manichean gnosticism (a mixing of science in the form of cosmology, mythology and Judeo-Christian theology from which was created a doctrine of rationalist redemption). The intellectual labours of Lenin and the 19th century revolutionaries were marked by the same search for a universal doctrine of salvation within the bounds of reason, by combining scientific foundations, revolutionary belief and motives borrowed from religion.

The cognitive exclusivism of Soviet ideology not only claims guardianship of the truth, but also sets the conditions to understand it, (the ideology). This is *partijnost'*, a positive partisan attitude towards doctrine: without personal and deliberate choice for the doctrine, it is impossible to recognize its truth. This is another meeting point with theology which also demands belief prior to the practice of theology – theology as *fides quaerens intellectum*. The truth is not manifested via objective criteria of knowledge or formal logic, but requires a sympathetic attitude, a personal willingness to accept the message. Hence, the rational criticism of the bourgeois scientist, of the unbeliever, affects the follower of the ideology not one bit, rather reinforcing his commitment.

Another particularly noteworthy element in the Soviet ideological concept of truth is the consideration of continuity in the explanation of that truth. Theologians call this the inviolate handing down of the apostolic tradition, being true to tradition. The truth being definite it cannot change under the influence of socio-political reality or scientific development. However, if doctrine is not to lose credibility it must be adjusted to altered circumstances. That is why ideological authority, namely those in political power, exercise control on doctrinal interpretation. It is they who select the instructors at party schools, faculties

of philosophy and institutes of social science; it is they who authorize ideological textbooks for schools. However official interpretation may adjust, distort and change doctrine, no break with the founding fathers – with tradition – is allowed. Hence, obsolete items such as world revolution, the withering away of the state, the disappearance of religion are not, in so many words, laid at the doors of K. Marx and V. Lenin as scientific fantasies and serious misjudgements. These items are not rejected *in toto*, they are reinterpreted and so brought up to date. A painstaking technique of quotation upholds the continuity in interpretation of Marx and Lenin and shields the founders' memory from any suggestion of human or intellectual imperfection. This deliberate policy of protection – as far as Lenin is concerned, merely one part of a comprehensive personality cult – clearly illustrates that the basis for legitimacy of Soviet ideology lies in loyalty to its heritage and not in scientific autonomy. Viewed epistemologically, this is how the ideology of the Soviet Union has acquired the character of a theology where the scientific element is also limited to systemization, reinterpretation and updating of the doctrinal tradition.

Despite the resemblance between theology and Soviet ideology in dogmatic starting points, there is an interesting difference in their assessment of orthodoxy. In theology the basic truths are formulated once and for all time, for example the creed and Papal pronouncements *ex-cathedra*. Historically established texts occupy a vital place in theology and many discussions boil down to assessment of the semantic status of the text.

Despite the pathological meticulousness which marks the preservation of Lenin's works, and the frequency with which they are quoted, the text itself plays a subordinate role in Soviet ideology. Interpretation of doctrine by those in power, not the literal meaning of the canonic text, is the decisive factor in Marxism-Leninism. Ideological orthodoxy is linked to a concrete situation: in that sense Marxist-Leninist doctrine is not changeless

or dogmatic, it changes constantly but in line with orders, by decree. This ongoing process is explained via the dialectic of theory and practice giving the ideology a hermeneutic flexibility which always leaves it in the right. Alain Besançon aptly denotes Soviet ideology's concept of orthodoxy *orthoglossy*: "The leadership decides what should be said and thought at a given moment and then at another, so that there is a sort of orthodoxy which can be dated in time, related to a particular situation, a directive, a ruling power. Orthodoxy is what the party *says* at the time and in the form in which it says it: it is an orthoglossy."²⁴

b. The concept of history The second intellectual similarity between Soviet ideology and religion is their eschatological view of history; this involves a fundamental division between an imperfect present and the final phase of history. The present must be seen and lived in the perspective of a perfect future when there will be neither class struggle nor shortages – or alternatively – neither sin nor suffering.

What makes the future so special is that we know so little about it. The same goes for the communist final phase of history, representations of which belong to ideological futurology. The paradox of communism is that whilst it itself does yet not exit, its science does. This science is based on historic optimism and not on technological prognoses or economic forecasts. But the communist doctrine of the future is not so speculative as it appears. Its description of the period in which 'everyone will receive according to his needs' is actually an extrapolation of Western consumerism in the Soviet future: the end of shortage (*deficit*).

Belief in a better future is an essential of Communist ideology and therein lies its attraction. Communist thinking is the opposite of doom-mongering or defeatism. Unfortunately, those hopeful for the speedy realization of that future have been regularly deceived. A full two generations after the revolution the ideal

is still beyond reach and Soviet ideologists realizes better than ever the difficulties which lie ahead. Instead of abandoning the ideal or trying another route, the ideology remains in force. History, which had already experienced a breaking point in 1917, has been divided anew. The post revolutionary era was split into the socialist phase and the phase of future communism. The former was subdivided into 'the construction of communism' and the period of 'developed socialism', but these are somewhat whimsical subdivisions, easily abandoned. However, the difference between socialism and communism is crucial in the ideology. It allows the possibility to postpone the final phase indefinitely and to pass off the unceasing post-revolutionary misery as a *temporary* imperfection: the ideal remains pristine and a thorny problem of interpretation solved.

A far more difficult problem in the communist doctrine of the future is the question of what will follow the communist phase: will it continue indefinitely or will it, in line with the laws of dialectical materialism be followed by an antithesis? Here ideology is silent — and quite rightly — but such an open question puts the entire dialectical concept of history on the line.

In analogy to the division of history, Soviet ideology has also made a division in society. It is a division between good and evil, progressive and reactionary, Soviet and anti-Soviet. This is no ordinary dividing line, it is the type which has been called Manichean (found in certain religious sects): good and evil being separated from each other not interwoven or equally present in the same man, the same society. The source of evil can be localized precisely — where else but in that section of society outside one's own system. That someone in the other camp may perform a good deed, does not mean a breach in the fundamental division of good and evil but leads to a new division into 'objective good' and 'subjective wrong'.

Communist ideology's dualistic picture of the world does not allow the dividing line between good and evil to be drawn

straight through ideological boundaries. There is no concept of universal human guilt and indeed ideology corrects religion accordingly. Hence a Polish Catholic publication was obliged to substitute 'we *Catholics* are sinners' for the original 'we men are sinners'. The rejection of man's inborn tendency towards evil is the basis of the feeling of moral superiority in the ideological ethic. This moral superiority is linked with the conviction that one possess the truth, with cognitive exclusivism. Ethically correct behaviour is a consequence of insight into the truth. The Soviet ethic is the application of the Platonic belief that virtue is knowledge.

c. The doctrine of salvation The third religiomorphic element in Soviet ideology is connected with the view of the world and concept of history described above. It concerns the belief in a happy ending to history and the victory of good over evil – that is to say progress over reaction – and the coming of communism. The religious character of this belief is shown by an inner contradiction in ideological theory of history. Nicolai Berdyayev had already remarked on this in his essay *Marxism and Religion*. Berdyayev sees historical optimism and historic materialism as incompatible. The idea that the history of mankind is economically determined, is a scientific observation or hypothesis. However, there can be no scientific explanation for the course of history ending in an apotheosis of civilization rather than an inhuman society. Put another way: from a scientific observation of its materialistic mainspring one cannot conclude that history has philosophical sense. Matter in itself has neither purpose nor positive direction. Neither is it possible to talk of history's objective meaning, only of man's giving history a subjective meaning and of belief in history.²⁵

The belief or hope in a happy ending is an acceptable starting point for human thought if this is not become defeatist. The specific point in the Communist version of this general human

belief is the materialistic and deterministic explanation it receives. Lenin's theory of the revolutionary party gives this Marxist belief the character of a specific doctrine of salvation. Whilst Marx teaches that history's inbuilt dialectic gives it a definite purpose, the communist phase of happiness, Lenin adds that this phase will not occur spontaneously. A political party will have to tell people about their goal and point the way. Only Knowledge of the truth and its employment as a base for actively steering history (revolution) can bring mankind the promised happiness. Ideology has thus become a rational religion whose acceptance is a condition of joining in mankind's salvation. And, as a doctrine of salvation the ideology has its idea of a chosen people, to wit – the working class and/or the Soviet people – to whom the truth about mankind's destiny has been manifested the first.

5. Social ritualisation

Alongside the intellectual area, there are also similarities between Soviet ideology and religion in the area of emotional experience. Here the relevant reliptomorphous elements of the ideology are: a) the political virtue system or ethos, b) socialist rites of passage, and c) the cult of the founder of Soviet ideology, Lenin. On the emotional level, the statist character of Soviet ideology is unambiguous, far clearer than in theoretical-scientific explanation of doctrine. Ethos, rites and cult have a common aim, the emotional binding of citizen to state. The norms and ideals of the state are individualized, so promoting identification of the citizen with the state. This function of ideology grows in importance as theoretical statements lose in credibility. Now that doctrine is a mere tool for scholastic contemplation by its professional defenders, the party ideologists and propagandists, the Soviet

government endeavours to insinuate the ideology into individual life via other means. Ideology is given an increasingly clear ritualistic expression and flavour.

As well as compensating for intellectual poverty of the ideology, the potential for emotional expression of ideology has been developed as a more effective counter to the competing view of life offered by religion. In official terms this is called promoting the victory over religious traditions. It appears that mere words were not sufficient to win this battle, so government came up with a set of alternative rituals. There is often a striking parallel between new ideological and old church rituals, hence the artificiality of the former. The fundamental difference is that the new rituals are deliberate creations of party and government, they did not arise out of emotional involvement of the people with the ideology. The process has been going on for the last twenty years as a continuation and revival of the ideological ethos or the communist political virtues dating from the October revolution.

a. The ideological ethos The Soviet ideological ethos is a complex of social and political virtues: group-awareness, loyalty to authority, working discipline, gratitude to the state, pride in Soviet citizenship, military patriotism, ideological vigilance and that most difficult of virtues to attain – political maturity (*političeskaja zrelost'*). These are the qualities which well form the much lauded 'new man', 'Soviet man'. The terminology of the 'new man' is reminiscent of biblical conversion, and indeed it assumes the sloughing off of the properties of 'old man': the bourgeois, individually centred ethic, the religious values and the whole false ideological consciousness.

Pre-revolutionary and immediate post-1917 descriptions deal with the new man in near-Nietzschean terms of physical and intellectual perfection, nowadays he is characterized in solely politico-moralistic terms. He is no longer a superman, not even

a revolutionary, he has become a political conformist, a good Soviet citizen, loyal to the state in every respect. Creation of this new being takes place through a collective and consistent process of education in which government employs all the means of political socialization in the arsenal of the Soviet ideological monoculture. The conditioning process termed 'Communist education' begins at schools and the youth movement with the *moral code of the builder of Communism*. In adulthood it is continued via a system of spiritual rewards ranging from a photo on the 'board of honour' at the main entrance to the place of work to the title 'Hero of the Soviet Union'. Other decorations and titles include: 'Hero of Socialist Labour' – 'Shock Worker of Socialist Labour' – 'Bearer of the Red Labour Banner' – 'Victor in Socialist Competition' – 'Participant in Communist Saturday Work' – 'Hero of the Soviet Union' – The Lenin Order – The Order of the October Revolution – The Order of Friendship of Peoples. These rewards go to those who have come nearest to achieving the moral ideals of communism.

These ideals are formulated in the *moral code of the builder of Communism*. Some of which express general ethical norms also found in christianity. These read as follows:

- dedication to the communist cause and love for the socialist fatherland.
- conscientious labour for the good of the community: he who does not work, neither shall he eat;
- care for all through the guarding and multiplying of social property;
- a high sense of social duty, intolerance of any violation of social interests;
- collectivism and comradely mutual assistance: one for all and all for one;
- humane relations and mutual respect between people: man is for man friend, comrade and brother;

- honesty and love of truth, moral purity, simplicity and modesty in social and private life;
- mutual respect in the family, care and education of children;
- irreconcilability towards injustice, parasitism, dishonesty, careerism and greed;
- friendship and brotherhood among all peoples of the USSR, intolerance towards nationalism and racial enmity;
- irreconcilability towards enemies of communism, of the cause of peace and of the freedom of peoples;
- fraternal solidarity with workers and peoples of all lands.

As is clear from these moral aims, the philosophically materialistic Soviet ideology is anything but materialistic in matters ethical. And although communism is building towards a society with an abundance of food and durables, consumerism is not part of the message. The ideological ethos calls for personal austerity and sacrifice: in aid of building future communism: voluntary Saturday work, giving up part of the school holidays to help with the harvest, pioneering in Siberia (on the BAM-railroad line) and pre-military training in free time. In fact communism has an aversion to hedonism, hence the regular warnings against the temptations of Western consumerism. By the same token, here is an explanation for Soviet sexual puritanism. Although the citizen is no longer taught that sexual love is damaging to revolutionary élan, love of country still figures far more prominently in the school curriculum than sexual love.

Important means for bringing ideological values and civic virtues to the attention of the citizen include political feast days. These are well integrated and organized into Soviet society. The two most important are The Day of the Great Socialist October Revolution on 7th November and Labour Day, 1st May; as far as official celebrations go, these are veritable explosions of Soviet patriotism with the Soviet Union's position in the vanguard of history and its military might as central themes. Ritual ex-

pression takes the form of speeches by political leaders – enshrined during a jubilee year in a solemn sitting of the Supreme Soviet – the military parade on Red Square and the procession of banner-wielding workers. The media report these manifestations in depth and fill the remaining air-time with tales and films of the revolution, interviews with workers, military music. Weeks beforehand citizens are urged to ‘accelerate socialist competition’ for a ‘dignified welcome’ to the approaching feast days. The calendar of feast days with a ideological promotional function also includes: 22nd April, Lenin’s birthday; 23rd February, Army and Navy Day; 8th March, International Women’s Day; 9th May, Victory Day; and 7th October, Day of the Constitution. There are also around forty days on which given trades and professions, arms of service or youth groups are in the national limelight. The people concerned are honoured nationwide and exhorted to re-double effort for the fatherland: miners, construction and agricultural workers, Militia (Police), border guards, missile and artillery troops, students and young pioneers – each have their day.

Lastly, the Soviet calendar features numerous commemorations of figures from Soviet political history. More than a simple mention of historical fact is involved, for not every important figure from the country’s past is remembered, only those approved by official party historians. The Soviet calendar offers thumbnail sketches of the *acta sanctorum* of the communist movement, so fulfilling the same function as a church calendar.

In dealing with the means by which the government tries to pass on the ideological ethos to the people it would be wrong not to mention the role of socialist-realist art. Its leaden pathos and artificial drama have long since deprived this school of any aesthetic function. But then, the primary function was never aesthetic: art for art’s sake has officially been rejected as bourgeois formalism. The function of socialist-realist art is on the moral level, the stimulation of feelings of national pride and communist

consciousness. Socialist realism is advertising rather than art: omnipresence in public life (posters, statues, monuments, paintings and television drama) has won it the self-same influence on the masses as the often equally tasteless commercial advertising in the West.²⁶

b. Socialist rites The emotive aspect of Soviet ideology has acquired clear expression in the secular ritualization of man's existential climaxes. A system of so-called socialist rites (*obryady*) has grown up, covering both traditional rites of passage – birth, marriage and death – and specific rites of initiation admitting the citizen to such social groups as the youth movement, army, collective, and to state citizenship.²⁷

The development of secular equivalents for baptism, marriage and funeral services began in the late 1950s, gradually acquiring a broader base in Soviet society; the subject is regularly discussed in the press and on television. With the failure of attempts thirty years earlier in mind, the new versions were introduced with the greatest of care. As far back as 1923 Trotsky in particular, believing the rational struggle against religious customs to be insufficient on its own, had called for a political alternative to the ceremonies with which churches marked the important events in life. 'Red Baptism' and 'Red Marriage' followed, but so blatantly were they rooted in political propaganda and so trivial was their ceremonial that they fell completely flat and were discontinued after four years. However, from the very start there were party members who saw in the new rites a surrender to bourgeois longings and found the rites all too reminiscent of the god-builders' ideas: registration of birth and marriage became, as before, a matter of a signature over the counter.

In the late 1950s the notion of a more fitting celebration of these events resurfaced. Khrushchev wanted a more effective anti-religious approach, it was his new campaign which provided the required impetus. The authorities also saw the new naming

and wedding ceremonies as counters to a worrying decline in attitudes towards and behaviour in marriage. The first socialist wedding ceremonies were performed in Estonia and Lithuania, swiftly followed by Leningrad where the first Palace of Weddings was opened in 1959. These first steps were spearheaded by the youth movement. In November 1963 and January 1964 the central committee of the CPSU made further recommendations to improve atheist education and promote the new socialist ceremonies. An all union conference which followed on this subject in May 1964 formulated a number of basic principles:

- organic linking of the new feast days and rituals with the Soviet people's way of life in the current phase of the building of communism;
- a clear progressive message and the principles of communist morality to be expressed in all new practice;
- a synthesis of the logical and emotional element in every feast day and ritual;
- atheist orientation which juxtapose the new rituals to the old, religious ones;
- the principle of internationalism must be expressed in the new rituals and feast days; to struggle against residual bourgeois nationalism.²⁸

After 1964 there was a more or less systematic organization of the new marriage and naming ceremonies in each republic, supervised by the ideological department of the Central Committee and the Ministry of Culture. Success has been mixed. The new rites have achieved a good hold in the RSFSR, the Ukraine, Estonia and Latvia; the Wedding Palaces in particular have won popularity for their ambience and the personal attention of the celebrants — a rarity in the Soviet service sector. However, reception in Catholic Lithuania and Islamic Central Asia has been markedly less enthusiastic.

If the original aim of the Soviet rites was to cancel out church traditions, it has been by-passed by what Binns calls "spiritual consumerism, the demand for greater colour, variety and freedom in people's lives, more enjoyment, more respect for individual feelings and tastes . . . It is a more spiritual consumerism than its Western counterpart, since its forms focus around the need for some transcendence of everyday political shibboleths and drab, impersonal bureaucracy".²⁹

The government wants to meet the individual desires of the citizenry at the same time as steering them along the correct ideological channels. The rites are in fact controlled outlets of these personal desires and as such go to confirm that ideology makes a total claim on the individual rather than offering an escape. A short description will illustrate the ideological set-up of these rites and ceremonies.

At the wedding ceremony, the official celebrant reminds the couple of their Soviet civic duties, the care of family as 'the most important cell in the state'. There is a bust of Lenin in the room and, the ceremony complete, it is usual to lay flowers at a well known local statue of Lenin — in Moscow, his mausoleum — or at a war memorial. The last option is most popular in the Ukraine where the couple also receives a torch to light from the eternal flame burning at the entrance to the Palace of Weddings. The form of words used for this goes as follows: "Esteemed Bride and Groom, please come up to the eternal flame. This flame is a symbol of our memory of those who gave their life for the freedom and independence of our Soviet Motherland, for the communist ideals, for a clear sky above us, for our happiness and the happiness of our children. May such a flame eternally burn in your hearts!"³⁰

The solemn registration of the newborn', or 'Solemn naming', is less popular but continues to gain ground now that more 'Baby Palaces' are being opened in major cities. Organization and ceremonial differs from republic to republic but permanent

fixtures include the singing of the national anthem, the presentation of a letter of congratulation from the local Soviet and a commemorative medal with the image of Lenin thereon. 'Honorary Parents' take the place of Godparents, they promise to join in child's social education. In the Ukraine the ceremony has an even stronger ideological flavour. The parents are first congratulated then reminded of their duties: "Dear parents, remember about your holy duty before our socialist society, to raise up your son/daughter as a worthy fighter for the full triumph of communism. Inculcate in him love of work and of his great Soviet Motherland. Let him be honest, just, good and respectful so that Mother Motherland (*Mat' Rodina*) will be proud of your son/daughter."³¹ The 'socialist funeral' is the most recent socialist ritual and the least elaborate. The nature of the event presents difficulties for ideological-philosophical treatment. In recent years special training has been given for professional funeral speakers (usually a part time job for students), who recall the good deeds the deceased has performed for society and refer in general to the desirability of a fruitful – working – life. Medals and awards are displayed on red cushions in front of the bier. For the rest, there is little difference with the Western civil equivalent.

A military funeral is another matter, providing an excellent opportunity for ideological-patriotic display, indeed those who fell in the second world war are commemorated in just such a manner. This makes the silence surrounding Soviet soldiers who fell on 'the field of honour' in Afghanistan all the more remarkable: their remains arrive at the local airport in the dead of night; their kin are instructed to organize the funeral with the minimum of fuss.

In contrast to the rites of the cycle of life in which both ideological and private elements are recognized, the various Soviet initiation ceremonies are created entirely for ideological aims: they are devoted to the 'three sacred traditions' of revolution, work and fatherland. First comes admittance to the youth or-

ganizations: the October children, 7-9 years of age; the young pioneers, 9-14; and the komsomol, 14-26. Membership of the latter is in fact a social necessity. Initiation usually takes place in a group on Lenin's birthday, 22nd April, or the Day of the Pioneers or Komsomol and, if at all possible, at a site dedicated to one of the three sacred traditions: in Leningrad, for example, the cruiser Aurora or the Piskaryov war cemetery. The ceremony is made up of a salute to the organization's flag, an oath of loyalty, a reading of the moral code of communism, singing of the national anthem and the laying of a wreath at the relevant monument.

The next rite in the life of a young Soviet citizen is 'the solemn presentation of the passport' after the sixteenth birthday and usually on the eve of the Day of the Constitution, (7th October). This is a purely political/propaganda event as the passport carries no special rights. The passport gives no entitlement to foreign travel, this is a domestic identity document containing all personal details including places of work and police record. As such, the passport is an important instrument of government control, indeed it is issued by the local police. Presentation to the brand new citizens is made by specially invited guests – war veterans or young shock workers. The patriotic atmosphere is reinforced by the singing of nationalistic songs and recitations.

In Estonia and Latvia a 'celebration of adulthood' replaces the passport ritual in July of the young person's eighteenth year. Originally introduced in 1957 to match Lutheran confirmation, 'celebration of adulthood' has now almost completely crowded it out. Popularity among young people owes something to the six day summer camp – filled with the romance and excitement of nightly torchlight processions in a woodland setting – which precedes the ceremony.

The last two ritual events in the life of Soviet youth are initiation into the working class (*posvjašćenie v rabočij klas*) and the call up for military service (*provody v sovetskiju armiju*). The first occurs around 1st May or 7th November, it varies in form

but regular elements are the speeches, oath taking and saluting the worker's flag. The 'send-off to the Soviet army' is accompanied by festivity in the town and at work, speeches from those already in uniform on the honour of being allowed to serve in the army and the sacred duty to defend the integrity of Soviet frontiers. The draftees then collectively swear an oath of allegiance.

So much for the summary of what the Soviet Union calls the 'socialist rites', the 'new traditions' or the 'civic rites'. Some Western authors, in particular C. Lane and C. Binns who are quoted here, include other ceremonies and festivities, such as those at school and in farming communities, payment of first wages and return from the army. This goes too far, these events are of only minor political relevance, moreover they are not typical of Soviet culture, whereas the political celebrations of life-cycle and initiations are definite products of Soviet ideology and clear expressions of its character as *Weltanschauung*.

c. The Lenin cult An especially emotive expression of Soviet ideology is found in the Lenin cult. It is special because on the one hand it has very clear reliptomorphous overtones i.e. features of veneration of the Saints and on the other properties which are unusual to such practices. The combination makes the Lenin cult as such grotesque. The person of Lenin functions as a moral example and as a proof of scientific legitimacy in Soviet society. He is simultaneously the ideal personification of the aforementioned virtues of the Soviet ideological ethos and the highest scientific authority in the land. His moral irreproachability goes hand-in-hand with intellectual infallibility, no Saint of religion has ever achieved this dual perfection.

It is not the moral example function which makes the cult unique, but Lenin's intellectual canonisation. Lenin is quoted in Soviet scientific publications, appropriately or not; his oeuvres are printed and reprinted in amazing numbers and occupy the place of honour in every library. No single member of the Soviet

scientific community, from humblest student to Academician, may criticize or disqualify him. Not only is this a new phenomenon in the history of science, incompatible with its very nature, it also fails to match the historical figure, Lenin, who never wrote a thing of value to the development of science. His collected works, which take up a good two metres of shelf space, consists of one philosophic work, *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, and various commentaries all springing from apologetic considerations. For the rest, there are pieces on matters of political concern, revolutionary-theoretical treatments and innumerable newspaper articles, speeches, pamphlets and letters — all highly polemic in style.

There are various motives for the quotation-mania in Soviet publications: piety, scientific admiration and opportunism are all possibles; the last of the three is obvious in dissertations to have won the nickname 'passport quotations'. But, one thing is certain, namely the political importance of constantly harping on Lenin's scientific infallibility. If Leninism is the most scientific ideology, the founding father must necessarily be 'mankind's greatest teacher' of philosophy and social science.

Politically, the second aspect of the Lenin cult, his moral canonization, is even more important than his scientific infallibility and enjoys wider grass-roots acceptance. For an incontestable majority of Soviet citizens Lenin has become the symbol of that which is good in the system: for many he is the uncompromised leader the Soviet Union has never known. However, much the system is criticized, Lenin retains the respect of the people: his myth, not his doctrine, is the main pillar of the Soviet system. Alexander Zinoviev provides a trenchant answer to the question of when the Soviet system will cease to exist: "Not before the lines waiting before the coffin of the great teacher disappear".³²

The leadership is well aware of this popularity and exploits it politically. Their condemnations of fundamental evils in the sys-

tem, like Stalinism, invariably refer to a departure from 'Leninist norms'. But most of all they keep the myth alive by a visible presence of Lenin in Soviet Society: the Lenin mausoleum, Lenin museums, Lenin monuments, busts of Lenin, portraits of Lenin and Lenin as a place name. There is Leninabad, Leninavan, Leninakan, Leninigori, Leningrad, Leninkent, Lenino, Leningorsk, Leninsk and Leninskoye; and Lenin gives his name to numerous collective farms and factories, innumerable streets, neighbourhoods, squares and parks to say nothing of metro stations, universities, ships, mountains, libraries, palaces of culture, stadiums and canals.³³

The country swarms with his busts and statues. No town is without at least one giant version, usually in front of the municipal Soviet building, neither do lesser public buildings nor department stores go unadorned, they too sport a bust of Lenin. Whatever the other shortages, a wide range of the busts are always on sale. And, a flourishing Lenin-iconography has grown up, there are posters, paintings, plaques and photographs hanging in a myriad public buildings.

Lenin monuments are usually found at the *leninskiye mesta*, the site of an important episode in his life: his birthplace, Ulyanovsk, derived from his real name and in turn the inspiration for other place names – Ulyanovka, Ulyanovo, Ulyanovskaya and Ulyanovsky – the forest huts in Siberia and on the Gulf of Finland where he hid from the Tsarist police, and his studies at the Kremlin and Smolny. All are destinations for youth movement and trade union outings.

Lenin museums have a special place in the cult. The largest, Moscow's Central Lenin Museum, boasts some 400,000 separate items linked to his life in some way or other; around 15,000 are on display in 34 separate rooms.³⁴ The collection includes manuscripts, first and second editions, press-cuttings, articles in daily use, clothing, photos, personal property and gifts to Lenin from the people. His career and life's work are covered

in depth with the aid of documentary material and creative flair. Alongside branch museums in Leningrad, Kiev, Tbilisi, Ulyanovsk, Tashkent, Lvov and Baku, there are a fair number of "home museums", *doma-muzei*, *kvartiry-muzei* and *pamjatniki-muzei*, in houses where Lenin lived; eleven in and around Leningrad alone, representing a total stay of two years. These mini-museums also display wide variety of Lenin memorabilia. Indeed, from no other figure in the history of the world can so much have been preserved and so many footsteps have been traced for the edification of posterity. This presents the paradox that V.I. Lenin is both the best materially documented figure in history and the most mythologized.

Without doubt, the most striking form of the imprinting of Lenin on Soviet society is the marble mausoleum on Red Square. The display of a crystal sarcophagus containing Lenin's embalmed corpse brings the cult to the pinnacle of the bizarre, putting traditional veneration of the Saints in the shadow. It is interesting to speculate on why the decision was taken in 1924 to preserve the mortal remains — a most unusual event in modern times. It could have been the idea that the people needed his visible presence as a permanent symbol of the new life begun with the revolution: this would have been in line with Russian political and Orthodox tradition — the leader as father figure and pilgrimages to tombs of the Saints. Then again, it could have been a spontaneous expression of the inability to accept Lenin's death.

In her article on the origins of the Lenin cult, N. Tumarkin offers an interesting solution.³⁵ She sees a link between religion and the cult of Lenin's remains — provided by two people involved in the funeral. Leonid Krasin and Anatoli Lunacharsky were both Bolsheviks with roots in god-building. Krasin was a member of the funeral committee, he supervised the building of the first wooden mausoleum and personally constructed the air-cooling system for the coffin. Before the revolution he had shared Bogdanov's belief that science would one day make a man

immortal. He officially resigned these beliefs in 1918, but in 1921, at the funeral of a fellow party member, he repeated them: "I am convinced that a time will come when science will be almighty and capable of restoring life to a dead organism . . . And I am convinced that when this time shall come, when the liberation of mankind employing all the might of science and technology, now beyond the realms of our imaginations, will be able to resurrect great historical figures — our comrade Lev Yakovlevich will be among them".³⁶

According to Tumarkin, Krasin must have been thinking along the same lines three years later when he was given the responsibility preserving Lenin's body and building a mausoleum which, in his own words, would surpass the importance of Mecca and Jerusalem. However, Krasin's cooling system proved insufficient. A month later a new committee was formed: The Committee for the eternalization of Lenin.

New methods of preservation were used and sometime later the decision was taken to replace the original wooden edifice with one in marble. The People's Commissar for Culture, Anatoli Lunacharsky, the former theoretician of god-building, chaired the committee. Tumarkin cautiously concludes: "Should we not assume that for Lunacharskii and Krasin it was the ardent religious striving of their earlier days, their god-building, which, finding a logical channel for expression, stirred them to help shape a cult of Lenin?"³⁷ What an ironic turn of history given Lenin's bitter opposition to the ideas of the god-builders and his own preference for a normal burial or cremation.

Although Tumarkin's explanation certainly sheds an interesting light on its setting-up, one cannot lay total responsibility for the Lenin cult on the specific god-building ideas of a few Russian Marxists. Seemingly, the cult of the leader is an established characteristic of the communist system, in which the political leader also has the function of ideological teacher. One can point to many other demi-gods in communist history, the only difference

being that, unlike Lenin, they set up their own cults: Stalin, Mao Zedong, Tito, Brezhnev, Ceausescu, Enver Hoxha and Kim Il Sung. The spread of the lader-cult within the communist world means that the Soviet manifestation can neither be seen as unique nor explained away as a relic of tsarism's Byzantine tradition. In the communist system the figure of the political leader is robed in extra authority by virtue of his ideological function: the secretary general embodies the highest doctrinal authority. And so, even more business-like leaders such as Honecker and Kadar use their periods in office to publish massive editions of work catalogueing their personal contributions to the development of Marxism-Leninism. These collected speeches, letters and articles are obligatory political education material at school and quotation fodder for the media. The works of these political leaders are the codified expression of statist values conveyed via the system of socialist rituals as already described.

d. Ideology and myth. Structural and functional meeting points of Soviet ideology and religion shown in this chapter all concern the surface aspects of the ideology. Alongside the content of the two philosophies of life, there are very real differences, particularly on the emotional level. Nowhere, not even in so-called Soviet rites-of-life, does Soviet ideology inspire personal involvement. Its apersonal view of mankind deprives the ideology of an adequate answer to that fundamental human question, "what is the meaning of life?". By the same token, the ideology has nothing to offer in the existential border area of suffering and death. The only spiritual comfort on tap is love of fatherland, historical optimism and a glimpse of the communist future provided by the school of socialist-realism in art. Questions on the certainty of this communist future and the purpose of individual suffering and personal death even in that future are not satisfactorily answered due to the denial of the ambiguity of human existence.

It is strange that although there can be no more obvious dialectic link than between life and death, here the ideology misses the essential by default, only stating that it is not a matter of man the individual but of mankind, humanity. However, mankind without the man makes no sense at all. When confronted with the eternal anthropological themes of love, guilt, suffering and death, Soviet ideology takes refuge in the collectivist abstractions of Fatherland, State, Working Class and Mankind: at these rarefied levels, personal problems cease to exist. At this point, the ideology is not a religion but a *myth* which also merges individual destinies into the total universe. But, ever since experience of the dualism between individuality and totality man is not to be dissolved in universal frameworks; the same is even truer of border areas of existence where he is thrown back on his own devices.

After the politico-social and philosophic rivalry between ideology and religion in Chapters 1 and 2 respectively, we now move on to a study of ideology's struggle against the content of religion: the actual atheism of Soviet ideology.

Notes

1. According to Seliger, Napoleon thus supported the pejorative meaning which it had already been given by the church. Theologians saw attempts to explain the origins of ideas via the sensual and physiological as an attack on metaphysics and theology. M. Seliger (1977), 14. It is interesting to note that this disqualification of ideology as being materialistic is a reversal of later criticism by Marx who reproached ideology as being metaphysical.
2. For the Soviet interpretation of Marx's concept of ideology see H. Dahm (1982) 265-305. I. Yakhot (1979) also covers the same theme.
3. V.I. Lenin (1958), vol. 6, 40 and 269.
4. R. Medvedev (1981), 17.

5. Lenin (1958), vol. 18, 138.
6. V. Adoratskij (1922), 209.
7. M. Jakovlev (1979).
8. *Bol'shaja Sovetskaja Enciklopedija*, 3rd ed. vol. 10, 40.
9. *Osnovy Marksistsko-Leninskoj Filosofii* (1975), 7.
10. *Naučnyj Kommunizm* (1981), 4.
11. R.N. Bellah (1967) introduced the term 'civil religion' — which he in turn borrowed from Rousseau — to political science; he saw it as typically American phenomenon. In a more recent joint study with Ph.E. Hammond, Bellah applies the term more widely as concerning the tension between politics and religious authority, e.g. at the ethical level: "Most societies have institutionalized ways of dealing with this potential tension. Whether we wish to call all such forms of institutionalization civil religions, or confine that term to only some of such forms, it is there that we must locate the problem of civil religion." (Bellah/Hammond 1980, VIII). Rousseau also intended the concept of "civil religion" to indicate a harmonization of religion and politics, and not a substitution of one for the other — as Hammond would have it (42-43).
12. K. Marx/F. Engels (1974), vol. 1, 378.
13. P. Blanshard (1952).
14. M. Gor'kij (1968-1981), vol. 9. These *Ispoved'* texts come from pages 341, 347-348 and 361-362 respectively. The comments by his contemporaries can be found on pages 538, 545 and 546 of the Notes at the end of the volume.
15. A. Lunačarskij (1908), vol. I. See 31-32 for the paragraph on Feuerbach, 32-37 for that on Dietzgen, 41-42 for the definition of religion and 227 for the final quote.
16. See R.C. Williams (1980) for Bogdanov's thoughts on immortality.
17. S. Bulgakov (1906).
18. G.L. Kline states that Nietzsche inspired the future oriented element in the god-builder's humanism. Lunacharsky's earlier writings had praised Nietzsche and Bogdanov also believed in the physical perfecting of man into *Uebermensch*. Kline (1968) 106-108.
19. The so-called utopian socialists like Saint-Simon and Barmby and the anarchist socialist Proudhon had already linked socialism and christianity. Saint-Simon wanted to replace existing christianity with a socialist 'nouveau christianisme' and Proudhon saw socialism as an ethical supplement to christianity. The Englishman, John Goodwyn Barmby went so far as to propagate a new church — a communist church — drawing

- parallels with the existing church to the point of absurdity: see J.H. Billington (1980), 254-259.
20. *KPSS v Rezolucijach i Rešenijach S'ezdov, Konferencij i Plenumov CK* (1953), vol. 1, 222.
 21. *O Tak Nazываемых Religioznych Iskanijach v Rossii*, in G.V. Plechanov (1977), 224-269.
 22. A.V. Lunačarskij, *K Voprosu o Filosofskoj Diskussii 1908-1910 gg.*, in A.V. Lunačarskij (1972), 438-443.
 23. A. Besançon (1981), 9.
 24. Besançon, *op. cit.*, 219.
 25. According to Berdjaev, Marx acquired his belief in the positive development of history as 'contraband' from Hegel. In Hegel's dialectical interpretation of history the Logos, the *Weltgeist*, is victorious. Hegel assumed an inbuilt logic in history and it is this which gives his dialectic its idealistic character. Marx transplanted the Hegelian a priori of inherently logical history to his 'reversed dialectic' whose starting point was not an idea but the material. However, in that the material has been attributed with the spiritual tendency towards good, dialectic materialism has acquired an idealistic premise. Berdjaev (1929).
 26. Political socialization is just one of the explanations for socialist realism in art and literature. The broader framework of cultural anthropology offers an additional explanation: the didacticism of official Soviet art can be compared with epical or hagiographic tradition of earlier societies. For such an analysis using mythological concepts see K. Clark (1981).
 27. For a detailed description of Soviet rites see C. Lane (1981).
 28. Lane, *op. cit.*, 47.
 29. C.P. Binns (1982), 307.
 30. Lane, *op. cit.*, 77.
 31. Lane, *op. cit.*, 73.
 32. A. Zinov'ev (1976), 199.
 33. An accumulation of Leninist toponymy can be found in the sentence: *Ja echal v Leningradskom ordena Lenina metropolitena imeni Lenina ot stancii Ploščad Lenina do stancii Leninskij Prospekt.*
 34. *Bol'saja Sovetskaja Enciklopedija*, vol. 17, 86.
 35. N. Tumarkin (1981), 35-46.
 36. Tumarkin *op. cit.*, 44.
 37. Tumarkin *op. cit.*, 46.

The Atheism of the Ideology

1. Introduction

The two previous chapters dealt with Soviet ideology as, an outlook on life, which imposes norms on each and every human activity, norms fixed by a state authority with the right to interpret that ideology. In its function as world outlook Soviet ideology displays formal and structural similarities to a religious *Weltanschauung*. Nevertheless, when it comes to content Soviet ideology stands diametrically opposite religion. The ideology makes definite statements on the existence of God and so arrives at a categorical atheism. As we have seen, this atheism is a logical consequence of the statist character of Soviet ideology which brooks no sharing of spiritual and ethical authority. Atheism is thus a practical necessity, a political inevitability of Soviet ideology.

However, the theoretical case for the atheistic imperative of Soviet ideology is derived from the philosophic (dialectic-materialistic) and the social-scientific (historic-materialistic) starting points of the ideology. The argument is well known: the material world exists on its own terms with neither beginning nor end; it has its own dialectic dynamic (the creative urge). Human consciousness is a reflection of material reality, and ideas in the human mind which are unconnected to the empiric world are false consciousness ('idealism') and distort reality. Theism, belief in a god and life after death, forms an essential element in the ideological distortion and justification of social reality in capitalist society; it comforts the exploited people with promises of eternal happiness after death. The social organisation

of the belief, the church, is an instrument of the ruling class designed to keep the people under control.

Such is the core of dialectical and historical materialistic criticism of religion as formulated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. However, as will be demonstrated, Vladimir Lenin, the founder of Soviet ideology put a more significant stamp on Soviet atheism than the founders of Marxism. Lenin's personal resentment of religion and his political attitude were more decisive in the birth of Soviet atheism than philosophical criticism of metaphysical methods of thought by Marx and Engels. In this connection it speaks volumes that Lenin always referred to "atheist propaganda" and "the struggle against religion", whereas Marx and Engels talked of "criticism of religion".

Two terminological points need to be made before we move on to an examination of the character of Soviet atheism. The expression I employ, 'ideological atheism', is not common usage in the Soviet Union: there, 'scientific atheism' is invariably used because Soviet ideology regards itself as the highest form of science. In place of this pretentious terminology I chose the business-like, 'ideological atheism' and 'Soviet atheism', or 'Leninist atheism'. 'Ideological atheism' in particular clearly denotes an individual variety differing from philosophical atheism (e.g. 18th century rationalism or 20th century logical positivism and existentialism) and what could be called the practical atheism of the contemporary Western society. Moreover, the combination "scientific atheism" is as mismatched as "scientific theism".

The second remark concerns the term atheism itself. The term is common in Soviet socio-scientific literature and in ordinary conversation frequently in combinations such as 'atheist upbringing', 'atheist *Weltanschauung*', 'atheist education' and 'atheist propaganda'.

In as far as comparable situations exist in the West, the terms used there are 'non-religious upbringing', 'areligious *Weltanschauung*', 'public education' and 'criticism of religion'. The

term atheist is far more apodictic than the Western terms, and that is completely in line with the Soviet interpretation of 'non-believing'.

2. Lenin and religion

In his condemnation of Lunacharsky's interpretation of socialism as a new religion Lenin referred to "that most odious concept, 'religion' and that disgraceful word 'god' ".¹ It is immediately clear from his manner of speaking that Lenin had a deep revulsion for religion; the very words used to denote the phenomenon are a source of grievous irritation. Lenin was not only an atheist, he was an anti-theist; and not just one who denies god but one who fights against the very idea. He was far more radical in this than the French philosophers of the Enlightenment school or Ludwig Feuerbach or the 19th century Russian nihilists or Karl Marx. He not only turned on organized religion, priest-ridden society (*popovščina*) and the morals of the church, he also savaged attempts to introduce religious terms in a symbolic or secularized sense, he opposed any modernization of religion and was against progressive attitudes and communist sympathies among the clergy.

His ideas on religion were set down in four articles and two letters; a number of additional pregnant statements are contained in other works: all-in-all not much, considering the extent of Lenin's total oeuvre. Even so, the articles *Socialism and Religion* (1905), *On the Relationship of the Worker's Party to Religion* (1909), *Classes and Parties in relationship to religion and Church* (1909), and *On the Significance of Militant Materialism* (1922) leaves no room for doubt. The same is true of the letters, which were addressed to Gorky in 1913 in reaction to his god-building

theories.² One separate remark on religion can be found in an article on Tolstoy: Lenin calls the writer's greatest fault, "preaching of one of the most disgusting things on earth, namely religion, and trying to put clergy with moral convictions in place of those officially appointed which comes down to the cultivation of most refined and therefore doubly revolting *popovščina*". A similar remark on attempts to refurbish religion can be found in the third of the articles mentioned above; in it Lenin expressed disapproval of "attacking the rough edges of clericalism and its police protection in order to *reinforce* religion's influence on the masses — replacing at least some too coarse, obsolete, worn out, ineffective means of hoodwinking the people with refined, perfected versions. The police-religion is no longer enough to fool the people, give us a more civilized, a renewed, a more flexible religion which can function in a self-governing parish! — that is what capital demands from the autocracy". The rest of the article deals with the debates in the Duma on the budget for the Russian Orthodox church and other administrative measures concerning the state church. These remarks were specifically aimed at certain delegates from the liberal parties. The warning on the churches' adjusting to modern times and the consequent strengthening of its position in society is a constant theme in Lenin's polemic against religion. The prominence given to such warnings in the letters to Gorky bears this out.

In the first letter Lenin is "appalled" that whilst Gorky is against the religion of *god-seeking*, he sees socialism as a new religion, that of *god-building*: "God-seeking differs from god-building or god-creating or god-making no more than a yellow devil differs from a blue devil. Any talk of god-seeking which is not aimed against all devils and gods, against every spiritual desecration — every god is a desecration, however pure or ideal, even if created — is choosing a blue rather than a yellow devil; that is a hundred times worse than not talking at all . . . Precisely because every religious idea, every idea about any god, every

slightest flirtation with a god is an unspeakable abomination greeted with great tolerance, often willingness, by the democratic bourgeoisie – precisely for this reason is it the most dangerous abomination, the most revolting ‘infection’. A million sins, atrocities, acts of violence and *physical* infections are more easily recognized by the masses and so less dangerous than the subtle, spiritualized ideas about god, dressed in the brightest idealistic raiment. A catholic priest who rapes girls is *far less* dangerous to democracy than a priest without his soutane, a priest without coarse religion, a priest with democratic ideas who preaches the idea of making and creating god.” Further on Lenin calls the image of man conjoured up by god-building, “the worst form of spitting upon oneself” by which man “considers that which is dirtiest, stupidest and most servile in his ego – all to be made divine by god-building”, he then repeats that this is a spiritual desecration.

A month later, the second letter is equally clear in its opposition to any mixing of religion with socialism. It goes on to attack Gorky, Lunacharsky and Bogdanov’s idea of god linked to the origin of social feelings in man and destined to master man’s animal individualism: “Just as christian socialists – the worst sort of ‘socialism’ and its most serious mutilation – you now try a trick which, despite your best intentions, repeats the worst hocus-pocus of the *popovščina*: that which by virtue of history and life belongs to the idea of god, is left out – superstition, prejudice, worship of ignorance and fear on the one hand and slavery and the monarchy on the other – and instead of the historical and every day reality a benign, petit bourgeois phrase is placed in the idea of god: god = ‘the ideas which stimulate and order social patterns’.” Lenin deploys his historic materialistic explanation against this idealistic facelifting of the god-concept: god is the justification of oppression and subjection and in no way an expression of social feelings; whilst recognizing that there was a period in history when “the struggle for democracy

and the proletariat was fought by means of the one religious idea against the other. But that era has long gone. Now, in both Europe and Russia, every, even the least, the most refined, the best intentioned defense or justification of the idea of a god is the justification of reaction."

In fact, the article *On the Relationship of the Worker's Party to Religion* had already stated Lenin's radical and uncompromising rejection of religion, "dialectic materialism is unconditionally atheist and resolute in its enmity to every religion." This was a reference to Engels' reproach of Feuerbach for attacking religion, "not to destroy it but to renew it . . . to set up a new 'higher religion'." Lenin left no room for doubt: "Marxism sees all contemporary churches and religions, every possible religious organization as organs of bourgeois reaction designed to defend the exploitation and stupefaction of the working class," and he repeats that the materialism in Marxism: "stands in merciless enmity to religion . . . that the struggle against religion is the a-b-c of materialism *as such* and therefore also of Marxism."

The rest of the article covers the methods for tackling religion as already set out in *Socialism and Religion*. Unlike the French Encyclopedists and Feuerbach, dialectic materialism does not confine its attacks on religion to the intellectual level. Lenin, whilst advocating the translation and mass circulation of the works of these atheist thinkers, was against the confines of: "an abstract, idealistic approach to the religious question, 'rooted in reason', divorced from the class struggle." Alone, theoretical propaganda against religion is not enough, the struggle must be seen in the context of the struggle for the liberation of the working class. Religion is part of the apparatus of politico-economic suppression and it too must be fought as such. Hence the struggle against religion is not an aim in itself but part of the total class struggle: "The unity of this real revolutionary struggle of the downtrodden class for a paradise on earth is more important to us than unity of proletariat opinion on paradise in heaven."

Unlike intellectuals and party members, Lenin made workers a special case, calling for an element of patience for their belief "in this or that remnant of old prejudices". Struggle should continue against "the inconsequence of every 'christian', but this does not mean that the religious question should be shifted to first place, a status it in no way deserves. No third-rate opinions and fallacies, which will in any case swiftly lose all political significance and which economic development will banish to the rubbish heap, may be permitted to split the forces devoted to the real economic, political and revolutionary struggle." On the same grounds Lenin criticized members who wanted all-out war on church and believers, and atheism as an explicit item in the party programme. He saw such measures rebounding, making believers more intransigent and thus prolonging the survival of religion; worst of all, they would distract from the political and social struggle: in place of class struggle would come a superficial anti-clericalism. In short, the struggle against religion should be conducted with tact, patience and consideration for religious feelings.

The fact that the struggle against religion is to take place within the framework of the class struggle means that religion cannot be a private matter for communist party members. Their very awareness that religion is rooted in the feudal and capitalist social structures prevents them from either believing or being indifferent. Lenin explicitly opposed the view held in the German social-democratic and French leftist circles of the day that religion should be a private matter. There is a partial explanation for this opportunistic deviation: in both countries religion had lost considerable ground to the bourgeois atheist propaganda of the Encyclopedists and Feuerbach as well as the anti-clericalism of the revolutionary bourgeois. Such was not the case in Russia where the church was still strongly bound to the state and nineteenth century populist atheism had little influence. But, according to Lenin, religion was to be seen as private matter in as far

as its relationship to the state is concerned, that is to say that there should be a total separation between church and state and school and church. Neither may the church receive state finance nor should the state register an individual's religion in official documents.

So, the anti-religion struggle should neither be an anti-church war, nor an abstract refutation of belief, rather it should be part of the total political struggle against the established political order. Any consideration need for the feelings of the faithfully was seen by Lenin as a matter of tactics: "Class struggle is a hundred times more effective in bringing christian workers to atheism than naked atheist propaganda". That this position could alter should victory in the class struggle not coincide with the fall of religion becomes clear from later developments in Soviet atheist propaganda.

A shift to a more direct anti-religious polemic is visible in Lenin's last article on the subject. *On The Significance of Militant Materialism*, published five years after the revolution, in 1922, set out the task of the newly founded philosophy periodical, *Under the Banner of Marxism* — namely to offer a vigorous defense of materialism, to preach 'militant atheism' and wage 'untiring atheist propaganda'; to this end, all international atheist literature was to be translated or, at the very least, discussed. Lenin called for special attention to be paid to eighteenth century works; for all their faults in Marxist eyes he praised them as: "witty, lively and shrewd, a hundred times better to waken the people from their religious sleep than the boring, dessicated, repetition of Marxism which dominates our literature and — let us be honest — which frequently mutilates Marxism". He had another message when it came to "modern, scientific criticism of religion" by the bourgeois, non-Marxist science. Its practitioners rejected religion but in such a manner that they remained, "the diplomer'd lackeys of the *popovščina*" replacing "old, decayed religious prejudices with brand-new, even more disgusting and

repulsive prejudices". Even so, Lenin told Soviet scientists to borrow from them anything of use in the struggle against 'religious obscurantism'.

The visible change to a more direct course of atheist propaganda could also be seen in the Russian Communist Party's 1919 programme. The communist government had already applied the separation of church and state and school and church demanded by the 1903 programme; in the new party programme it declared: "In the area of religion, the RCP is not content with the separation of church and state and school and church as decreed . . . The party promotes the actual liberation of the working masses from religious prejudices by organizing the broadest possible scientific and anti-religious propaganda. But any injury to the feelings of believers should be avoided as that can only lead to reinforced religious fanaticism."³ Lenin's inclusion of this point is all the more remarkable in that his 1905 article, *Socialism and Religion*, opposed a separate item on atheist propaganda in the programme of the then Russian Social-Democratic Workers party on the grounds that this would only repel people and split workers into believers and non-believers. In addition to the already mentioned separation of church and state, the only other demand in the 1903 programme was for "unlimited freedom of conscience" and "total equality of all citizens regardless of sex or religion".

The announcement of the anti-religious struggle in the 1919 programme marked the start of what in a later stage of development would come to be called, "the work of the party relating to the definite destruction of all forms of religious belief among the masses of workers and peasants" and "the definite and total destruction of religious prejudice in the minds of tens of millions citizens of the republic."⁴ Appropriate words indeed with which close this summary of Lenin's ideas and attitudes vis-a-vis religion. The information it contains allows both for a more specific description of Soviet ideological atheism and comparison with other forms of atheism.

3. The characteristics of ideological atheism

Lenin's approach to religion is striking for its vehemence and emotion. The language used is everything but business-like and scientific. The reiteration of such adjectives as "disgusting, revolting, shocking, odious, damned and horrible" — often in their superlative form — together with less than neutral substantives in the order of "swindle, fallacy, poison, infection, spitting-upon-oneself, spiritual desecration, obscurantism, hocus-pocus, stupefaction, fog, darkness, sleep and prejudice" suggest intense revulsion rather than an unprejudiced analysis of the phenomenon. The most important source of this antipathy was not an intellectual conviction that religion lacks any scientific base but the realization that it is a political stumbling block. Lenin saw religion, the church as a political power factor first and foremost — a factor hindering the party's exercise of power and limiting the hold of the ideology on the mind and spirit. His motivation was above all political: and so it follows that he had little time for purely scientific criticism of religion which rejects only the theology of the religion, whereas his attack targeted religion itself: the church would have to go an the people — Lenin's 'masses' — would have to accept the ideology as the one true philosophy of life and *Weltanschauung*. Lenin's atheism was anti-theism and anti-religion being part of a political ideology.

The power-politics motivation is the first characteristic of ideological atheism. However, the rejection of religion on grounds of political conviction does not mean that the church's visible power structure and role in society are the only objects of criticism. Ideology battles against religion as such because religion creates its own set of values and norms which in turn threaten ideology's ethical monopoly. Consciences formed by religion allow believers to be critical of ideology. And so, even a church which withdraws into a world of private piety and liturgical

ceremony, even individual belief in the ten commandments have no place in the communist ideological monoculture. The ideology will not even recognize belief as a private matter; the individual in a communist society cannot fall back on a conscience formed by spiritual values over and above or outside ideology. In other words, ideological atheism is a categorical and radical atheism.

Another characteristic of ideological atheism which emphasizes its categorical nature, is its belief in itself as the one true atheism, the true unbelief. It brands other forms as either inconsistent or unscientific: inconsistent in that their's is a purely theoretical rejection of religion bereft of practical political struggle; unscientific because they are not based on the syntax of dialectical materialism.

For the third characteristic of Soviet atheism one can point to its confessional/religiomorphous nature. Communists have to be professing atheists, in contrast to non-communist unbelievers for whom atheism is only a scientific observation or personal conviction. Ideological atheism is not private opinion resulting from individual scepticism or existential doubt, it is a an organized unbelief. It has its own formulation of belief, its own doctrinal literature, it makes itself heard and seen via propaganda campaigns and apologia. There are many organizational similarities between ideological atheism and an church religion. Given its character of a professed belief, ideological atheism, like its church counterpart, must put up a defense against both external attack and internal sapping of faith, indifference. The latter is resistance to the pressure of organized atheism rather than a choice for religion. Such indifference can best be described as a-atheism. It is a frequently recurring phenomenon in soviet society and a greater threat to the position of Soviet ideology than the so-called religious renaissance in the Soviet Union.

The gravity of this apostasy within atheism can be judged from government's repeated warnings on the lack of interest shown

by youth and teachers alike in atheist lessons. The seriousness of the situation is compounded by the fact that a-atheism is part of general loss of interest in and indifference to the state ideology. Even if indifference does not mean hostility, it still undermines the foundations of the ideological state. It is a form of secularization within the ideological monoculture, a removal of ideology from the personal sphere. This in itself is an undermining of the system given that the Soviet ideological monoculture officially allows neither 'don't knows' nor 'don't cares' pertaining to its *Weltanschauung*.

4. Comparison with other forms of atheism

The three characteristics of ideological atheism, the political motivation, the categorical method of expression and confessional form were to a large extent decided by Vladimir Lenin. His role in the creation of ideological atheism is generally under-rated, Leninist atheism is often seen as a direct extension of Marxist criticism of religion and dealt with exclusively in that context. Thus, Hans Küng's monumental study of atheism, *Existiert Gott?*, devotes a mere two pages to Lenin – albeit mentioning his 'unbeschreibliche Hass' of religion. In his *Phenomenology and Atheism*, an analysis of two centuries of religious criticism notable for its clarity, W. Luijpen gives Lenin but a single page. And the work of reference entitled *Religionskritik von der Aufklärung bis zur Gegenwart*, although treating Marx and Lenin separately, devotes considerably less space to the latter.⁵

Giving Marx pride of place over Lenin is justified as far as the philosophic side of religious criticism is concerned in that Lenin had nothing original to say about it: he adopted the atheist premise of materialistic ontology from Marx, and unlike other

followers of the master, such as Plekhanov and Kautsky, never developed supplementary theories on religion. And although the political approach to religion lies firmly locked in Marx's interpretation of history – further built on by Lenin – it is at this very point that the differences with Marx start. In any case, Lenin gave Marxism a far clearer political dimension by seeing his doctrine as an instrument for gaining power, by making the doctrine party ideology, adding revolutionary strategies and applying to it a hierarchy of values with strict interpretational norms. Obviously this also meant the politicization of Marx's religious criticism. A further factor in Lenin's general politicization of Marxism was his personal resentment of religion. Its cause of must surely have gone deeper than experience of the orthodox church in tsarist Russia, it is too radical for that. But, to do full justice to Lenin's place in the development of ideological atheism a short sketch is required of Marx and Engels' attitude to religion.⁶

Marx had professed atheism in his dissertation, as far back as 1841, underlining his declaration with the promethean words, "I hate the gods". His atheism was formed and substantiated via contacts with the young Hegelians, Bruno Bauer and Ludwig Feuerbach. This early conversion to atheism – Marx had a religious upbringing at home, his Jewish parents having become protestants – means that he was an atheist before developing his historic materialistic philosophy. In Küng's words: "Marx war schon längst Atheist bevor er Kommunist wurde. Die antikapitalistische Einstellung war nicht Voraussetzung, sondern Bestätigung seines Atheismus."⁷ From the very start of his scientific developments, Marx took atheism as read, something to be accepted by every enlightened person.⁸ In this, he conformed to the spirit of his times, when, the first impetus from the French Enlightenment philosophers having past, atheism was enjoying widespread circulation thanks to the bible criticism of D.F. Strauss and Bruno Bauer and criticism of religion by Ludwig Feuerbach – the real founder of modern atheism.

Marx adopted Feuerbach's theory of religion as a form of projection — man's embodiment of his own being, his hopes of immortality, omnipotence and happiness. Though Marx never challenged the projection theory as such, he would later supplement its anthropological explanation with a social basis. According to Marx, the projection was a form of man's alienation from himself as part of the general alienation due to the socio-economic structure of society. Following on from Feuerbach he wrote: "Für Deutschland ist die Kritik der Religion im wesentlichen beendet, und die Kritik der Religion ist die Voraussetzung aller Kritik."⁹ Küng's conclusion is as follows: "Auch in diesem sachlich-historischen Sinn also geht der Atheismus dem Kommunismus voraus! Und man beachte: für Feuerbach waren Religion, Theologie und Atheismus noch Gegenstand ständiger Auseinandersetzung. Für Marx aber ist der Atheismus nun eine nicht mehr zu begründende oder ernsthaft zu diskutierende Selbstverständlichkeit geworden"¹⁰

Working on the conviction that what had to be said about religion had indeed been said, Marx paid the problem little or no further attention. Its origins, rather than religion itself, would to be the object of his studies. In the words Marx's definitive score-settling with religious philosophy: "Die Kritik des Himmels verwandelt sich damit in die Kritik der Erde, die Kritik der Religion in die Kritik des Rechts, die Kritik der Theologie in die Kritik der Politik."¹¹ Marx, with his reductionist religious criticism (religious ideas reducible to economic factors), went far beyond Feuerbach whom he reproached for going about his business in an overly theological manner and reaching erroneous conclusions on the nature of man. Neither were once kindred-spirits, fellow members of the young-Hegelian study club — his friend Bauer in particular — immune: Marx would later despise their religious criticism as overly influenced by Hegel's spiritual style of philosophizing.¹²

So, Marx's own contribution to the development of atheism

consisted not of its creation, but of putting socio-historic bases for explanation in place of the psychological. Quite simply, Marx integrated atheism into his own materialist interpretation of history. This put it in a position to enjoy the reflected popularity of the new theory of society which in turn lent new impetus. At the same time it became less important as an object of study and item of propaganda as the same theory foresaw the withering away of religion as historical phenomenon: in the new, socialist society man would have no further need for projection and/or religious illusion.

Friedrich Engels made a more direct study of religion's role in the historical social process. In two respects he went beyond Marx's criticism of religion: he involved the natural sciences, including Darwin's theory of evolution, and ethnological studies of primitive religions.¹³ And this was not the only way in which Engels provided atheism with a more solid basis in the teachings of Marx. The philosophic extension in dialectic materialistic syntax which he gave historical materialism made Marxism as *Weltanschauung* a more rounded whole and as such ever increasingly a "atheistischer Religions-ersatz oder atheistische Ersatzreligion".¹⁴

To summarize, Marx's attitude to religion was that it was characterized by what W. Post called, "ein eklatantes Desinteresse".¹⁵ To Marx, religion had been overtaken theoretically, it was an institution to all intents and purposes given up for dead – further philosophic contemplation on its nature was time wasted and active political attack was unnecessary. This atheism could better be described as post-theism, a state of mind in which the question of God's existence – yea or nay – no longer occurs. Atheism is in any case a fellow traveller with theism, and "in the Communist society not only will religion be a thing of the past, atheism will also cease to exist."¹⁶

Marx and Lenin differed in their attitudes towards religion. Taking the above into consideration, one is better able to clarify

that difference. Both were convinced atheists, but Marx's intellectual contempt allowed him to adopt a less vehement stance leading in practice to tolerance – unlike Lenin with his obsession for combating religion. When his friend, Jozeph Dietzgen, likened socialism to a new religion or gospel, Marx felt no need to rant and rave against him; neither did Engels hesitate to draw a parallel between communism and primal christianity – what a contrast to Lenin's passionate opposition to Lunacharsky and Gorky's religious terminology! Missing intellectual distance from the question of religion, Lenin's atheism was categorical and quite unbending in its rejection of all real, para and semi-religions; and this prevented him from seeing the extent to which he, himself, had given his anti-religion a pseudo-religious character. In this respect Lenin's atheism surpassed the first appearance of political atheism at the time of the French revolution. The Jacobins were rigorous enough in their proclamation of atheism to abolish the christian calendar, but they did not reject the idea of religion: they set up the religion of reason, with the deist's Supreme Being as God, complete with ceremonial and worship. That Lenin did not abolish the christian calendar was due to his sense of reality. The Soviet calendar has eliminated the overtly christian by substituting “before and of our era” for B.C. and A.D.

By radicalizing atheism and giving it its politico-confessional character Lenin took a unique place in that development of ideological atheism begun by Marx, and indeed in the whole atheist tradition of European cultural history.

Pre-Marxist 19th century Russian atheism also belongs to that tradition. Belinsky and Herzen were the first clear exponents in the 1840s, later on radical thinkers like Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov, Pisarev and most notably, Bakunin, would give it more clear cut form. Indeed, there had been outspoken atheists among the earliest revolutionaries, the Decembrists of the 1820s. Lenin was well aware of this home grown atheism; both he and

his contemporaries acknowledged the influence of Chernyshevsky and Pisarev, in particular, on his atheist development.¹⁷

Soviet historians see this nineteenth century Russian atheism as proof of contemporary atheisms roots deep in time and national character: by extension this proof is used to show that Soviet atheism does not represent a break with Russian culture.¹⁸ At the same time they point out that this form of atheism made theoretical errors — hardly surprising since the early exponents had either yet to encounter Marx or, pre-dated Lenin, failed to understand him. In the Soviet view, the major mistakes made by Russian atheism were over-idealism, insufficient socio-political reasoning — or in Bakunin's case, that it was too near the political forefront. In fact Bakunin's stance on religious criticism vis-a-vis Lenin is an interesting one. Despite being diametrically opposed on many points of theory, as far as political radicalism and abhorrence of religion goes, Lenin and Bakunin had much in common, each man's atheism was equally politically determined and borne along by the same personal hatred of religion.¹⁹

Non-Bakunist Russian atheism differed from Lenin's in essential points of motivation. The Decembrists, Belinsky, Herzen and the Nihilists were no political atheists, they were not even political ideologists but poets, literary critics and general publicists. This Russian atheism was a rejection of God on rational-ethical grounds. For some the rational element played a greater role, for others the accent lay on ethical indignation at the sufferings of humanity. In 1824, the Decembrist poet, Alexander Baryatynsky, encapsulated the attitude as follows:

*Impotently righteous or unrighteously omnipotent is he.
See but history and nature's code,
And ye shall say that if for own glory,
His will condemns the world to suffer,
Should God exist, then should we God deny!*²⁰

In fact, this sort of rational-ethical argumentation relating to the denial of god is the oldest reasoned form of atheism. Epicurus

(341-270 B.C.) used it and for centuries christian philosophy has wrestled with the presence of God *and* evil in the world.

These fundamental principles put nineteenth century Russian atheism in a tradition as old as critical thought itself. However, Marxist-Leninist atheism views the denial of God as the solution of a syllogism or as an explanation of an ethical impossibility as overly abstract and — when they lead to the preaching of universal brotherly love — as overly sentimental to boot. Ideological atheism does not see evil and suffering in history as proof of inconsistency in the idea of God, but rather as a practical reason for resistance to religion and state which cause the suffering and invent God in justification. Ideological atheism also misses the ethical motivation — the general sympathy for humanity which came across so clearly in Russian atheism. Nicolai Berdyayev, stressing the ethical character of Russian atheism, said that it sprang from compassion whereas communist atheism sprang from rancour.²¹

Despite the very real difference there is also a common element in nineteenth century and Soviet Russian atheism. This has to be seen in the very fact that both the ethical protest of the one and the political resistance of the other take a deliberately atheist route. The Russian, in as far as one may employ such a generalized abstraction, is clearly not indifferent to the problem — the question — of God. He is for or against, he is a believer or an unbeliever, but never sceptical or uninterested. The reality of the problem in the Russian mind is illustrated in the following quotations, their arguments are apposite rather than scientific. The first of the three comes from Turgenyev's *Memoires*, where Belinsky reacts as follows to the suggestion of an interval during a long drawn-out discussion about God: "We have yet to solve the matter of God's existence — and you want to *eat*." The second comes from Dostoyevsky's *Idiot*: "The Russians will be no ordinary atheists — no, for them atheism will become a new faith. They will believe in it without realizing that they believe in Nothing,

so great is our need for belief.” That such is still the case we hear from the lips of the party secretary in Alexander Zinoviev’s *Yawning Heights*: “We’re often asked whether God exists or not. We answer in the affirmative: yes, God does not exist!.”

Returning to the place of Lenin in European atheism, we can conclude that, although not among the great god-critics because he failed to supply any original thoughts on religion and religious consciousness, he was indubitably one of history’s greatest adversaries of religion. As such, he did as much to eliminate religion from his country as did the Grand Duke Vladimir of Kiev, from 988 on, to promote christianity in Russia. Lenin’s was the first major systematic attempt to de-Christianize a country since Julian the Apostate. Hence, the spread of atheism in the Soviet Union cannot be likened to the natural process of secularization although this also plays a role. Government runs the operation as part and parcel of creating an ideological monoculture. Lenin’s historic role in spreading atheism was probably more influential than that of the great philosopher-critics of religion, Voltaire, Feuerbach, Nietzsche, Freud, Sartre, Russell and so on. These thinkers fought the idea of god with literary, philosophic or scientific means, but may be, never with such tangible success as Lenin enjoyed with his political methods. On the other hand, they did not gainsay themselves by filling the vacancy in the human spirit with a new pseudo-religion, albeit some among them were missused in such a way (Voltaire by the Jacobins, Feuerbach by the Marxists, Nietzsche by the National Socialists).

Philosophic atheism differs from ideological atheism in all three of that form’s major characteristics: it is scientifically argued and not politically motivated; it is a personal matter not a collective confession; it is open to religious symbolism and esthetics, accepting the beliefs of others instead of being categorical and intolerant. It is also more readily classified as scientific than is ideological atheism. In so far as ideological atheism can be called scientific, the word ‘scientific’ is used

in the scientistic sense and not in the critical-analytical sense. Marx's scientism lies in the monocausal theory of economic determinism, explaining all human thought and action, and answering those questions traditionally dealt with by philosophy and theology. On the basis of the *system* in development of human and natural history, Marx decided it was possible to predict the main elements of the future in such a way as to free them from philosophical and theological speculation.

Marxist atheism should be understood as ideological atheism: unlike philosophic-scientific atheism, its interest in religion and religious consciousness comes solely from a political angle. In fact, it declines to recognize the philosophic legitimacy of the God issue as such, and hence the significance or meaningfulness of discussion about God.²² The scientism which lay at the very heart of Marxist denial of God has been overtaken. It was the philosophic byproduct of the industrial revolution and eighteenth century natural-scientific optimism. Modern science has long abandoned metaphysical pretensions held by scientism. In this, modern attitudes have left Soviet Marxism-Leninism behind. Agnosticism is the most accepted attitude to the God-issue in contemporary science and philosophy — the view that there is no possible answer either way. It is often a personal denial of God without the scientific confirmation of that denial and it springs from a recognition of the bounds of human knowledge: it is perhaps the only possible scientific position on God and matters transcendental. Even so, it is a position as incompatible with the dogmatic atheism of the Soviet ideology as is theism. The relationship of Soviet atheism and agnosticism is that of disbelief versus ignorance; and so Soviet ideological atheism ranges itself not only against religion but also steps outside the pale of modern philosophic and scientific thought.

Soviet ideology's rejection of agnosticism goes further than a confirmation of atheism. Agnosticism as 'metaphysische Stimmhaltung' (H. Schlette) is fundamentally incompatible

with the closed character of the Marxist–Leninist system of thought in which no question on *Weltanschauung* goes unanswered and questions to which there are no answers are considered scientifically senseless. In his analysis of modern agnosticism Schlette indirectly shows how far the agnostic attitude differs from the Soviet ideological mentality.²³ On the one hand there is a strictly logical form of agnosticism based on logical positivism, on the other a more intuitive or existential form springing from the realization of the enigmatic character of the world and life. Both the emotionless acknowledgement of the bounds of human knowledge and the personal, tragic or absurd experience of human limitation are alien to the proud, self-assured Soviet philosophic position.²⁴ Being the last system of a universalist philosophy, Marxism is – every bit as much as Hegelianism – the opposite of agnosticism.²⁵

Returning to atheism, Soviet ideology's rejection of agnosticism has led to an extensive doctrine on the non-existence of God, a reversed theology: 'scientific atheism' (*naučnyj ateizm*). This scientific discipline is an obligatory part of every study in higher scientific education. The Institute for Scientific Atheism of the Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee of the CPSU watch over its orthodoxy. It is now time for further examination of the scientific status of this science whose practice is confined to the Soviet Union and other communist states.

5. Atheism versus agnosticism

The border between modern atheism and agnosticism is vague. In fact, outside communist countries, philosophers have ceased propagating that definite atheism of rationalist, positivist era. In general, it is recognized that the existence or non-existence

of God can neither be scientifically proved nor disproved. Belief and disbelief (the belief in the impossibility of the existence of that which cannot be proved) are pre-scientific propositions for which rational justification can only come after the event. This is the same type of rational justification used to reason other human experiences like the perception of beauty, consciousness of ethical norms and love.

In holding its categorical denial of God to be a scientific certainty, ideological atheism in the Soviet Union refutes its own scientific status. As dogmatic disbelief, ideological atheism can be compared to doctrinal or dogmatic theology. In both forms of scientific argument the conclusion can be foreseen via the hypothesis, or something is proved which the practitioner of the given science already regards as incontrovertible. Seen epistemologically, Soviet ideology's self-dubbed scientific atheism has the same status as theology. As such, it operates at a different level to the science of religion (*Religionswissenschaft*). The latter examines the phenomenon of religion from various angles – comparatively, structurally, sociologically – but does not deal with statements of faith by the religions examined. Hence, the science of religion does not require its practitioners to be either believers or convinced atheists. However, scientific atheism studies religion in order to expose and demonstrate falsehood in statements of faith and religious doctrine. As with dogmatic theology, one cannot practice the science of scientific atheism without having made a personal choice – without, in this case, being a practicing atheist. Moreover, one must see religion as a social evil, an instrument of political deception. The scientific atheist studies the subject not only to expose its intrinsic absurdity but also to learn to fight it better in practice. The ideological study of religion results directly in atheist propaganda, the preaching of disbelief. This intrinsic need for propaganda is actually the *raison d'être* of scientific atheism. In contrast, the science of religion is solely motivated by desire to satisfy scholar-

ly curiosity. As the negative print of religion, scientific atheism is itself a potential subject for research into the science of religion.

According to the ground rules set out by Soviet ideological atheism, a principal choice against religion is no disqualification for objective study of religion. Soviet ideas of what is scientific are based on the *partijnost'*, communist party spirit or partisanship which precedes all scientific criteria and standards of objectivity. In the Soviet view, science can only be objective if based on those laws of historical development revealed in Marxism-Leninism. The aim of Soviet science — of the humanities in particular — is the ongoing justification of these laws. Scientific objectivity is measured against ideological correctitude and the usefulness of science is decided from the angle of political practice. The body which lays down what is ideologically correct and what political practice ought to be is the communist party. History itself has given this task to the party. This means that, in the Soviet Union, science fulfils a role in the process of political socialization which the communist government realizes in society.

Given the dialectical relationship between science and political practice in the Soviet Union, it is hardly surprising that the methods of scientific atheism are decided by that discipline's propaganda function. And so, a number of elements one expects in a normal scientific approach are absent, such as self-critical distance, originality, internal differences of opinion and a business-like attention to opposing arguments. Indeed, the most common and obvious of scientific tools — discussion with opponents — is prominently absent. The Soviet science of atheism favours the soliloquy, it is a form of science immune to doubt, monolithic in proof and pickled in sectarian dogmatism. It operates via selective rendering of facts and political accusation of believers. The latter have no chance to publish their own opinions. Atheist books and periodicals are legion, print runs go into hundreds of thousands, but no single theological or religious-philosophic book is publicly available — including the Bible. Public debate

with theologians has been forbidden since the 1920s. This avoidance of serious dialogue with believers clearly demonstrates the defensive attitude of Soviet science of god and religion. An ideologically conditioned science is always defensive and apologetic by nature.

In view of the above, it is understandable that, despite the continual stream of atheist literature appearing in the Soviet Union, ideological atheism has yet to bring forth a single work which has won the attention of international scholarship or, for that matter, has become a coveted object on the domestic market. Not one book has appeared to match the sharpness of perception and power to stimulate found in Bertrand Russell's celebrated, *Why I am not a Christian* or in a work by the Dutch academic, R. Beerling, *Niet te Geloven: wijsgerig schaatsen op godgeleerd ijs* (Unbelievable: philosophical skating on theological ice).²⁶ Russell's book is not unknown in the Soviet Union where it is held up as proof of atheism in Western intellectual circles. At the same time, a Soviet study of philosophic atheism or 'bourgeois atheism', to use Soviet terminology, entitled *The Freethinking of Bertrand Russell* criticized the variant as "inconsistent", "superficial", "abstract", "individualistic", "lacking a basis in class consciousness", "tending to agnosticism and scepticism" and last but not least as "resulting in a human belief instead of political struggle against religion".²⁷ This criticism of Russell clearly shows that Russian atheism offers more than simple opposition to belief in God, quite categorically it intends to propagate the only correct atheism, the true disbelief. In this context, Western 'bourgeois' atheism comes over as an error within atheism.

Beerling's book provides a further demonstration of the difference in intellectual climate between modern philosophical and dogmatic Soviet atheism. Without ever naming Soviet atheism, Beerling summarized the matter as an atheism which wishes to know nothing of God and an atheism which can know nothing

of God — “resistance or distance”. The first category, which the writer also calls “a promethean atheism moved by an impatient libertarian pathos”, can hardly include communist atheism — far rather that of Camus and Sartre. Beerling’s more extended ‘group portrait’ of atheism gives fourteen characteristics of an atheist; only one of these applies to the Soviet atheist, namely acknowledgement of the Feuerbachian theory of projection.²⁸

Beerling calls himself “a convinced and obstinate but at the same time, tolerant godless one”. That sort atheism is unacceptable to Soviet ideology, not only because of the nature of its denial of God (which is based not only on Feuerbach but also on Kant and the analytical philosophy of language), but also because it recognizes the ‘cognitive impotence’ of the non-belief and turns against the illusory certainties of “each monopolistic belief, *Weltanschauung* or ideology”.²⁹ Critical atheism as such is a threat to the ‘scientific atheism’ of Soviet ideology and to the ideological truth concept as a whole. Hence, Soviet atheism sees the “criticism of the shortcomings of bourgeois atheist literature”³⁰ as another of its tasks.

Textbooks on Soviet atheism constantly emphasize the difference between bourgeois and its own scientific atheism. In so doing, its own atheism is not only called the *only* scientific atheism but also *the highest form or degree of atheism* (*vyšaja forma, stepen’ ateizma*). Soviet atheism thus ranges itself both against all forms of theism and all non-orthodox forms of atheism. Thinking of itself as the one true disbelief makes Soviet atheism a unique phenomenon in today’s secularized world. In fact, this confessional character of ideological atheism is a hindrance to the formation of a real secular culture in Soviet society — a culture in which neither religion nor the fight against religion would play a dominant role. As long as the Soviet Union remains an ideological state, the government having a direct vested interest in maintaining said ideology, will remain committed to the propagation of ideological atheism.

Notes

1. See Chapter 2, p.
2. Socialism and Religion, Lenin (1958-1965), vol. 12, 142-147; On the Relationship of the Workers Party to Religion, vol. 17, 415, 415-426; Classes and Parties in Relation to Religion and Church, vol. 17, 429-438; On the Meaning of Militant Materialism, vol. 45, 25-29; Letter to A.M. Gorky, vol. 48, 226-228 and 230-233; Lev Tolstoy as mirror of the Russian Revolution. vol. 17, 206-213. Quoting Lenin's works inevitably produces typographical problems. The over-generous use of an emotionally styled punctuation – inverted commas, italics and extra spaces between the letters of a given word, dots and dashes, double or combined exclamation and question marks and bracketed explanations – gives his articles a chaotic appearance. If in, quoting Lenin, one adds new inverted commas and explanatory words in brackets, clarity is lost. Hence, I have adopted Lenin's extra inverted commas and italics but mainly discarded his other typographical idiosyncrasies.
3. *KPSS v Rezoljucijach* (1953), vol. 2, 49.
4. *op. cit.*, 469 and 472.
5. H. Küng (1978), 274; W. Luijpen (1979), 182.
6. This summary reflection of Marx's attitude towards religion is based on Küng, *op. cit.*, 251-299, Luijpen *op. cit.*, 123-204 and Weger (1979). 218-231.
7. Küng, *op. cit.*, 257. Cf. Luijpen, *op. cit.*, 137, 185 and 188.
8. Weger, *op. cit.*, 220 and 228.
9. K. Marx/F. Engels (1974), vol. 1, 378.
10. Küng, *op. cit.*, 260. Cf. Weger, *op. cit.*, 219.
11. K. Marx/F. Engels (1974), vol. 1, 379.
12. *Thesen über Feuerbach*, *Zur Judenfrage* and *Die Heilige Familie* respectively.
13. *Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft* ('Anti-Dühring'). This work by Engels is more widely read than *Das Kapital* and has become the standard textbook of the communist movement. Cf. Küng, *op. cit.*, 272.
14. Küng, *op. cit.*, 274.
15. Weger, *op. cit.*, 220. W. Post, the author of the article on Marx, cast doubt on whether Marx was indeed the original source of the celebrated formula "Religion is the opiate of the people". Marx may have borrowed

- the slogan from Heine or Bauer. N. Lobkowicz said of Marx's attitude to religion: "Seldom if ever has christianity been so radically taken unseriously as in Marx. What could be more humiliating to a christian than to be told that he is not an enemy worth fighting, since he is done for anyway?" N. Lobkowicz (1967), 308. Further on Lobkowicz does say that Marx's atheism is latently militant by virtue of its own secular messianic element, and that its militancy could easily come into the open if the expected demise of religion was unduly long in coming (334-335).
16. Luijpen, *op. cit.*, 168. Stromberg talks of Marx's 'beyond-atheism position'. M. Stromberg (1979), 209.
 17. D. Bociurkiw (1967), 110-111.
 18. A.D. Suchov (1980), 10.
 19. The Mensheviks had earlier established this similarity, the wreath they sent to Lenin's funeral carried a dedication: "To V.I. Lenin, the greatest Bakuninist among Marxists." This incident was recently referred to in N.P. Poletika (1982). See *Kontinent* 36 (1983), 373.
 20. The last line of the poem is a deliberate reversal of Voltaire's: "Si Dieu n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer". For the complete poem see V. Orlov (1975), 386-388. Hence, it should be noted that Bakunin's *God and the State* was not the first occasion when Voltaire's aphorism was paraphrased.
 21. N. Berdjaev (1931).
 22. A. van den Beld points to a philosophic and a practical-scientific aspect in Marx's criticism of religion — the practical-scientific being most important to him. In this, Marx created an original, "in principle verifiable, i.e. empirically refutable theory of religion". Van den Beld demonstrates that Marx's sociological explanatory theory of religion has indeed been refuted by history as is witnessed by the continued existence of history in communist countries. A. van den Beld (1976). The most recent addition to the abundant literature on Marx's attitude to religion is a study by A. Senge (1983).
 23. H.R. Schlette (1979).
 24. Schlette, *op. cit.*, 8. Cf. W. Post (1979), 50-52. From Post's quoting of Engels one sees how flippantly the latter dismissed agnosticism. To Engels, the most powerful refutation of agnosticism lay in "die Praxis, nämlich das Experiment und die Industrie. Wenn wir die Richtigkeit unserer Auffassung eines Naturvorgangs beweisen können, indem wir ihn selbst machen, ihn aus seinen Bedingungen erzeugen, ihn obendrein unseren Zwecken dienstbar werden lassen, so ist es mit dem Kantschen unfassbaren 'Ding an sich' zu Ende".

25. Cf. Schlette, *op. cit.*, 223.
26. B. Russell (1957); R.F. Beerling (1979).
27. A.S. Kolesnikov (1978), 4, 5, 6, 121, 125.
28. Beerling, *op. cit.*, 141-142.
29. Beerling, *op. cit.*, 10, 120, 142.
30. Kolesnikov, *op. cit.*, 7.

Atheism and the State

1. Tension between ideology and constitution

The constitutional separation of church and state in the Soviet union does not mean that the state is neutral towards religion: Marxism-Leninism being a state-philosophy, its atheist element occupies a special position in the order of things political. Constitution, civil and criminal law give atheism a preferential position, in state schools — and hence *all* schools — it is the officially approved and taught philosophy of life. This makes it possible to say that atheism in the Soviet union functions as a state religion, a *Weltanschauung* privileged by law and supported by government. So atheism is promoted via two routes: via the legalistic limitation of religious activities and the explicit propaganda of godlessness. Both date from and have continued since the earliest days of the Soviet Union. But they have developed along the way — from open persecution of the church to administrative limits on communities of the faithful, and from aggressive public campaigns promoting atheism to integrated atheist education as part of the political socialization of the people.

Freedom of religion is included in the constitution. At the same time it is at loggerheads with the constitution. In other words, religious freedom is in line with the letter rather than the spirit of the law. The constitution is required to guarantee that which is ideologically out of court. Thus, religious freedom is more or less a concession, a tolerated deviation. It is this tension between the ideological spirit and letter of the constitution which has caused the detailing of religious freedom in the Soviet law to become so involved, so that little of the original constitu-

tion safeguards remain. It is a paradox that Soviet law interferes more with religion, with acts of commission and omission by the faithful and with the religious life of citizens than the law of any other country with a state church like England, Denmark or Greece. So subject is religious practice in the Soviet Union to regulations, administrative guidelines and technical conditions that the constitutional right of religious freedom can best be described as minimal. That freedom guaranteed by the constitution is neither generous nor complete. Freedom of religion extends as far as is necessary for the government to win and keep the loyalty of the believers among its subjects. In this it differs from the situation in communist Albania, which in 1967 officially declared itself 'the first atheist state in the world', all public and private religious practice being forbidden. In comparison, the Soviet Union enjoys a reasonable measure of religious freedom. But, if Poland is used as a yardstick, religious freedom in the Soviet Union appears very limited.

The limits imposed by law would alone be insufficient to prevent a greater degree of religious expression. But the Soviet Union was a state in which government was free to play fast and loose with the law. Despite precise stipulation of their rights, the church and its faithful lived in constant uncertainty: in practice they were at the mercy of arbitrary interpretation of the law by local government, and the political whims of those at the very top. There was no non-partisan justice to protect the rights of believers. A global historical overview of Soviet policy vis-a-vis the church and atheist propaganda will make this clear.¹

2. Anti-religious legislation before 1941

In the years immediately following the October revolution the communist governments problems with religion were mainly

political and involving the Russian Orthodox Church, the former state church which had to be neutralized if the new government was to establish its authority. Baptists and other denominations discriminated against by Tsarist law were first spared as potential underminers of the Orthodox Church. After 1925 they became equal targets. As far as the political neutralization of the Russian Orthodox church was concerned, government knew its mind from the start – this in contrast to the party line on atheist propaganda which was far from being a priority in the period of ‘war communism’.

In their first months in power the Soviet government took political action against the church: a decree dated 26th October 1917 (according to the old calendar) nationalized church land; on 2nd November the Decree on Rights of the Russian People did away with the legally inferior position of non-orthodox religions; on 11th December all school and seminary premises were transferred from church to Ministry of Education jurisdiction; obligatory church marriage ceased on 16th December and divorce was introduced two days later; the government subsidy for the maintenance of church buildings and payment of clergy by the state was ended on 20th January. However unpleasant these politico-administrative measures may have been for the church, they are not peculiar to atheist government. Most of them had already been effected in non-communist countries: in this, Russia lagged behind most modern states.

The Soviet government’s most important declaration of principles on the religious question came on 13th January 1918 in the form of the Decree on the Separation of Church and State and Church and School by the Council of People’s Commissars. Politically speaking, the decree also featured a number of progressive regulations, in particular equality before the law for believers and non-believers. In a number of key points it resembled the 1905 French declaration on church/state separation. It is safe to assume that those who compiled the Russian decree

were familiar with the French version: as Luchterhandt writes in his standard work on Soviet religious legislation, the 13th January decree “verkörperte seinerzeit das radikalste TrennungsmodeLL eines bürgerlichen Staates”.² However, the difference is that in the French case “kirchenfeindliche Intentionen durch Folgegesetze, eine wohlwollende Rechtssprechung und überhaupt die Wirkungen eines liberaldemokratischen Rechtsstaates neutralisiert wurden”. Not only does the Soviet decree amputate church privilege, it also does away with the elementary right of the church to operate as a social assembly. A clarification which followed further reduced the already minimal freedom of worship. Soviet separation of church and state bestows the church’s former privileged position on the state: the state takes over the position formerly occupied by the church in society.

The Decree contained thirteen progressively less liberal statements of position. The first four involve generally recognized principles promising freedom of conscience and worship for all creeds and beliefs.

1. The Church is separate from the state.
2. Within the borders of the republic it is forbidden to promulgate any local regulation or ordinance limiting the freedom of conscience or bestowing privileges on citizens on the grounds of membership of a given confession.
3. Every citizen has the right to belong to the religion of his choice or not to belong to any denomination whatsoever. All deprivation of rights is hereby ended.
 Note: All mention of citizen’s membership or non-membership of a religious denomination is to be removed from all official documents.
4. The proceedings of state and all other public, social bodies will not be accompanied by any sort of religious ritual or ceremony.

The party committee responsible for the draft of the decree put the first point somewhat differently: “Religion is a private matter for every citizen of the Russian Republic.” Lenin was personally responsible substituting “The Church is separate from

the state", a highly significant change. The draft was too outspoken in its statement of the right to individual religious conviction, the adjective "private" cordoned off an entire area from state influence. Lenin's formula does not imply the same privacy of the citizen, only the removal of religion from the state sector and that part of public life controlled by the state. The ultimate aim of the state – of the communist party – is to remove religion from private life as well; and, in that it does not make religion a private matter immune from state interference, Lenin's text leaves that option open. The state's claims on the conscience of the citizen also show through in the altered title of the decree. The draft formula read "On the Freedom of Conscience, Church and Religious Communities", Lenin corrected this to "On the Separation of Church and State and Church and School".

Lenin had previously contested the idea of religion as a private matter in his 1909 article *On the relationship of the Workers' Party to Religion*. In it he disputed the view of Western social democrats that religion was a private matter for the individual. Quite clearly he could not express this in an official government document like the decree, at least not explicitly. An inclusion in the new party programme for 1919 was another matter: article 10 stated that the "Russian Communist Party is not content with separation of church and state as already passed . . . and that it will strive for the actual real liberation of the working masses from religious prejudice". This comparison of governmental decree and party document clearly illustrates the tension between constitutional rights and the spirit of the ideology referred to at the beginning of the chapter.

Point 3 ('Note') and point 4 of the decree go further as regards the position of church and state than would be the case in most Western countries. Whilst, strictly speaking, they do not necessarily indicate an anti-religious attitude, taking the Soviet ideological mind into consideration, such was certainly the case. The same goes for the next two regulations. In principle the ban on processions

and non-exemption from military service apply – or applied until recently – in many Western countries. Obviously, government's attitude to religion is crucial in the interpretation and implementation of said regulations. In practice the Soviet government's anti-religious intentions are given a free hand:

5. The free practice of religious ceremonies is guaranteed in as far as these neither disturb public order nor infringe the rights of citizens of the Soviet Republic. Local authorities are empowered to take such measures as may be required in such cases to maintain public order and safety.
6. Religious belief is no grounds for avoiding civil duties. Exceptions may be made by substituting one of said duties for another, each individual case to be decided by a decision of the people's court.

These two points in particular allowed the Soviet government, in the first instance, to put protestant denominations in a more favourable position than the Orthodox Church. Conscientious objectors were only allowed in these protestant groupings (Decision of The Council of People's Commissars 4th January 1919).

The following point represented on the one hand a justified abolition of compulsion of non-believers, and on the other a restriction on public witness of belief, Point 8 put an end to an anachronism:

7. The religious oath and the swearing thereof is abolished. When necessary, a solemn attestation will suffice.
8. The population register will kept by the civil authority alone, through the duly appointed registrars of marriage and birth.

The last five paragraphs of the decree contain the major infringement of the rights of religious groupings and the limitations on dealings and organizational freedoms of the churches. These regulations made deep inroads on the life of the churches in the Soviet Union. Over the years government has refined them via ministerial ordinances, constitutional and local decisions, and

above all in secret directives — more of which have been made public in recent times. The five points read as follows:

9. Schools are separate from church. Religious education is forbidden in all state, social and private educational institutions teaching general subjects. Citizens may teach and learn religious subjects privately.
10. All church and religious groupings are subject to general regulations governing private associations and groupings. They enjoy neither preferential status nor receive any form of subsidy from the state or its local, autonomous and self governing institutions.
11. Obligatory collections and taxes on behalf of church and religious groupings are forbidden, as are any form of compulsion or punishment of their members by said groupings.
12. No church or religious grouping may possess property. Such groupings cannot be legal entities.
13. All property and possessions of all existing church and religious groupings in Russia are declared forfeit to the people. By special dispensation of local or central government buildings and objects specifically designed for liturgical purposes are loaned free of charge to said groupings.

The removal of their legal status and confiscation of all their property were fatal for the church as institution. In law, the first blow meant dissolution into countless, disunited congregations, the second made charitable work impossible.³

A special department of the People's Justice Commissariat was set up to impliment the various points; on 24th August 1918 this department issued an important instruction which would be the legal basis for Soviet policy on church matters until 1929. Other government bodies, The People's Commissariats for the Interior and Education, and the *Cheka/GPU* also set up special departments to watch over the correct implementation of the separation decree. From 1922 onwards the various organs were supervised by a special commission for the implimentation of the decree under the auspices of the Central Commitee. The chairman, Yemelyan Yaroslavsky, would later play a major role in organizing atheist propaganda. In 1924 a government body,

the Secretariat for Cult Affairs of the Council of People's Commissars, was set up alongside the above commission, to oversee the total effort.

The Justice Commissariat's 24th August 1918 instruction contains the celebrated proviso that groups borrowing church premises and liturgical items from local authorities must number at least twenty. This was the so-called *dvadcatka*, as it transpired an important instrument for shutting existing churches and opening none in new districts. Failure of the twenty believers to keep strictly to the letter of the contract and to abide by the following can also mean church closure:

1. The maintenance in good order of property loaned by the people.
2. Meeting all costs including repair, heating, insurance, security, repayment of loans, local taxes (although, as a rule, property tax is not levied on premises loaned gratis).
3. The building to be used exclusively for religious purposes.
4. Payment for any damage occurring from use, on return of said property to the state.
5. The keeping up of an inventory of all liturgical items.
6. Designated representatives of the local Soviet to have unlimited right of access to inspect said property, when no service is taking place.
7. In event of misuse or extravagance, immediate return of premises to the local Soviet.

The instruction also shed some light on vagaries in the decree of separation, in particular religious education in "private". "Private" turned out to mean at home or at the home of a priest, but not in public church buildings. The instruction dated 24th August 1918 also allowed religious education in "special institutions for theological education". Whilst, in principle, this regulation allowed churches to train their clergy, at the same time it closed all existing seminaries. Theoretically a new seminary could be set up — as property of the People's Commissariat for Education. On 5th September this very body published a regulation limiting entry to such seminaries to persons of eighteen

and over. Religious education of other people “in private” was limited by an instruction dated 21st June 1921 to groups of not more than three.

These instructions and regulations established the broad basis of Soviet policy on religious and church affairs and realized the actual confiscation of church buildings and the elimination of the church’s national organization structures. The local groups of twenty in their borrowed churches were answerable to the town or village Soviet, and to them alone. Regional or national church authority – bishoprics, the patriarchate etc. – no longer had any basis in law, nor any say in the dissolution. As stated in a declaration made by The People’s Justice Commissariat in 1920, and repeated in a joint instruction with The Commissariat of the Interior dated 19th June 1923: “Churches and places of prayer are loaned directly to those citizens who enter into a contract with the duly appointed committee of the local Soviet, and not to the higher church authorities”. Just how far these scores of believers take note of higher church authority is in direct proportion to their willingness to run even greater risks in their relations with the authority of state.

1929 brought a range of new legal limits on religious matters. An amendment to the constitution forbade “religious propaganda”, replacing it with “freedom of religious confessions” (*religioznych ispovedanij*) alongside “freedom of anti-religious propaganda”. In short, this meant that freedom for religious instruction in groups of no more than three “in private”, that is in the bosom of the family, or at someone else’s home, was ended.

The other important legal measure limiting freedom of action by believers was the Law on Religious Associations issued by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Council of People’s Commissars of the RSFSR dated 8th April 1929. With minor alterations made by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet in 1975, this legislation still regulates religious affairs in the Soviet Union. The differences with the 1918 legislation, the

Decree on Separation of Church and State and the Instruction of the People's Commissariat of Justice, lay in the extreme severity of conditions under which church associations (parishes and congregations) were allowed to operate and increased potential for government interference.

A new feature of the 1929 legislation was the ban on the / "organization of special prayer or other meetings for children, young people and women, of general bible, literary, handiwork, religious instruction and suchlike gatherings, groups, circles or sections as well as excursions, childrens playgrounds, libraries and reading-rooms, sanatoria and help for the sick". The ban even extended to "giving material help to fellow members". The church's loss of status as legal entity, its reduction to groups of local believers lacking any regional framework, meant that these limitations on the activities of individuals bit all the harder. Now the meagre organizational function of the *dvadcatka* was also curtailed; and the new legislation gave government the right of veto on the three committee members elected by the *dvadcatka* members. The government was given a battery of reasons for ending the loan agreement with the *dvadcatka* not only on the grounds of building, hygiene and financial regulations, but for such general legal infringements as "illegal actions by believers, breach of the peace", and notably "that said buildings are required for use by the state or community".

The job description of the clergy – in Soviet legalese, "servants of the cults" – deserves a separate mention. For a start, activities are confined to the "religious association" to which the individual is appointed. Under a supplementary instruction from the People's Commissariat for the Interior dated, 1st October 1929, the cult-servant must first be registered by the government; in other words, the government was given the power to veto appointments.⁴ Eighteen months later, on 16th January 1931, the same body issued a new instruction banning parish clergy from membership of the parish committee. Disenfranchisement of the clergy

had already been a feature of the 1918 constitution which prevented clergy — like other representatives of the ancien régime counted as “not working” — from voting in civil elections.

The new Soviet constitution of 1936 restored the franchise to the clergy. At the same time it added to the limits already imposed in 1929 on religious freedom: freedom of religious confessions was intended to be “freedom to perform religious cults” (*otpravlenija religioznych kul'tov*), the celebration of services and the singing together of religious songs or the saying of prayers. Sunday as a permanent day of rest was also abolished in 1929 in favour of a continuous working week with variable rest days: to all intents and purposes “the performing of religious cults” on Sundays had become impossible.

The new legislation on religious associations was reinforced by the Secretariat (later Committee) for Cult Affairs of the Council of People's Commissars. The extra powers covered registration of all religious congregations and the appointment of clergy. In the 1930s this committee was a highly effective organ in the administrative dissolution of religious congregations.⁵

3. The organization of militant atheism

Alongside the political means it employs against religion as an institution, the Soviet government turns the means of propaganda on the target of religious thought itself. Atheist propaganda — “anti-religious agitation and propaganda” as it was called in the 1920s and 30s — is the job of the communist party, but government, as executive organ of the party, is directly involved in propaganda in education, the media and the arts/culture.

Educational work on the “anti-religious front” in the years immediately following the October revolution was chaotic to

say the least. The communist party programme for 1919 may have called for “the organization of the broadest possible anti-religious propaganda”, but no further guidelines were given nor responsible persons delegated. In the early years the form, content and intensity of propaganda depended on the enthusiasm of the local authorities. Propaganda only really got going in the aftermath of the civil war. By the mid-1920s there were signs of a centrally run, systematically organized, nationwide campaign of anti-religious propaganda.

Atheist propaganda first came under the special department of the People’s Commissariat of Justice responsible for implementation of the church/state separation decree, headed by P. Krasikov. The department published the Soviet Union’s first atheist periodical, *Revoljucija i Cerkov’* – Revolution and Church – between 1919 and 1924. Content included official decrees on religious matters and a generous portion of anti-religious propaganda.

Shortly after the civil war had ended, at the 10th Party Congress, the main committee for political education (*Glavpolitprosvet*) at the people’s Commissariat for Education was made responsible for the organization of anti-religious propaganda. The committee was headed by Lenin’s wife, N. Krupskaya, who as a pedagogue had a special interest in atheist upbringing and education. The committee was ordered to fight the propaganda battle on a grand scale using all the most up-to-date means available – photography and film. The committee organized school courses, lectures in the countryside and saw to it that classrooms were well stocked with anti-religious literature.

The appropriately named publishing house, *Ateist*, was founded in 1922. Its task was the translation of the relevant bourgeois literature into Russian. The same year saw the first anti-religious papers in Moscow and Petrograd. However, unlike the nationally distributed daily, *Bezbožnik* (The Godless), launched on 21st December 1922, they did not last long. Thanks to its editor,

Yaroslav Michailovich Yaroslavsky (the nom de guerre of Minei Izrailevich Gubelman) *Bezbožnik* was to become the spearhead periodical in the growing anti-religious movement. Yaroslavsky's organizational feats and publications made him the central figure of the inter-war years of Soviet atheism. His first book, *Kak Rodjatsja, Živut i Umirajut Bogi i Bogini* (How Gods and Goddesses are Born, Live and Die), appeared in 1923; his second, *Biblija dlja Verujuščich i Neverujuščich* (Bible for Believers and Unbelievers), was serialized in *Bezbožnik*; it is a classic of Soviet atheist propaganda.⁶

A significant anti-religious event of a quite different nature occurred as the Russian Orthodox faithful celebrated their Christmas in January 1923. The Komsomol, the communist youth movement took the opportunity to organize an anti-religious carnival procession in Moscow: this in itself gives a vivid picture of the militant atheism of the period. The official newspaper *Izvestija* for the 9th and 10th January was lyrical in its reporting of the Komsomol-Christmas:⁷

When the turgid, reeking fog of religion lifts from the world, mankind will look back on its naive past and give thanks that the first public challenge to god was made in Soviet Russia on 7th January 1923 . . . The god-fearing community in Moscow witnesses something it had never seen before: an endless procession of the world's gods and priests wending its way from Sadovaya Square to the Square of the Revolution. A practical aid to the study of a thousand years of bigotry. Here are to found the yellow Buddha with his crooked legs, his blessing hands, his slitted eyes, his tired, crafty expression; here is the Marduk of Babylon and the Orthodox mother of god. A Chinese bonze, the pope of Rome with his golden triple-crown, a protestant minister. A Russian priest offers to perform the marriage ceremony in return for tip. A monk is prostrated across a coffin filled with holy relics. He too peddles his services to easily satisfied customers. A Jewish rabbi chants sweetly, his hands raised, the song of a priest who had a dog . . . Dancing devils with black velvet masks and horns attract the attention of the public . . . What splendid work by the Komsomol! We shall meet again after Easter. But do not forget to bring more trumpets, flutes and domra's — much noise will be needed to drive out the foolishness of a thousand years.

Izvestija was equally complimentary about anti-religious demonstrations in other towns such as Rostov-on-Don, Tbilissi, Novorossiisk, Ryazan, Smolensk and Novogrod. As well as processions there were fancy-dress balls with participants dressed as gods, goddesses, The Virgin, devils, cardinals, nuns, mullahs and the like. Anti-religious tribunals were held in front of churches, synagogues and mosques. Osiris, Jehova, Allah, Maya and others were burnt in effigy; and there were plays and film shows. "The Christmas of the Komsomol" in the words of *Izvestija*, was "the first scientific popular anti-religious demonstration in the world". However, such was popular revulsion at their blasphemous crudity that the communist party was obliged to ban any further processions. Anti-religious plays and films were still allowed on church feast days. Titles of such performances were "The Immaculate Conception" and "The Opening of the Holy Graves".⁸

For the first time on such an occasion, the RCP dealt with the theme of religion in the Soviet Republics at length during the 12th Party Congress in April 1923. Previously, most instructions and resolutions on anti-religious propaganda had come from the Central Committee. The congress resolution underlined the importance of thorough preparation and scientific-materialistic foundations of atheist propaganda and called for special attention for minority denominations like Moslems, Catholics and Baptists. The party also recommended caution and care not to hurt feelings of believers.

Developments during this period showed two differing approaches to anti-religious propaganda – radical and moderate. Proponents were split between various party factions locked in the then unfolding leadership succession struggle.⁹ Yaroslavsky was supported by Stalin, and Trotsky, the confiscator of sacred church objects in 1922, was the choice of most radicals. The moderate victory was swiftly followed by condemnation of the radical direction as a "leftist, anarchist deviation". The radicals had favoured any and all means regardless of believers' reactions.

Although the moderates viewed slighting of deeply held beliefs as potentially counter productive, leading to increased “religious fanaticism” — once in power, after 1926, they were anything but gentle. The soft/hard controversy was really more than a symptom of the rivalry for the succession. For that matter the communist party has always had an ambiguous attitude: on the one hand, particularly in the Komsomol, young people are stirred-up to take the hard anti-religious line, and on the other, excess is condemned. And that care taken not to hurt religious feelings springs not from any genuine respect but from experience that belief feeds on jeers and martyrdom.

The differences boil down as follows: the moderates wanted to fight religion with scientific argument and, in line with Lenin’s *On the Significance of Militant Materialism*, to make use of bourgeois atheist literature. Their opponents feared that scientific argument would give religion the chance to adapt to that very science; hence their preference for direct action — disruption of church services, ikon-burning etc. — described by Delaney as “a short-range shock-technique” in preference to Yaroslavsky’s “long-term education”. The moderates were also relatively tolerant of the loyalist Living-Church for its schismatic effect on the official Orthodox Church. The anti-religious fundamentalists had no time even for a collaborationist church, they even went so far as to call for an ‘anti-religious dictatorship’ to destroy religion. Lastly, the Yaroslavsky faction favoured involving non-party members in the propaganda battle and the radicals wanted only convinced communists.

But there was a third school, branded “an opportunist right-wing deviation” by the Soviet historiography of atheism. According to its proponents, Marxism foresaw the natural withering away of religion as soon as its social causes were removed in socialist society. Hence, they felt that explicit anti-religious propaganda was superfluous. Such views were widespread in the Ukraine and again particularly among teachers. Their demands included

the substitution of “a-religious” for “anti-religious” education.

The battle — via the atheist press — continued until 1926, in the paper *Bezbožnik* representing the moderates. One month after the paper had been launched the radical set up their own organ, *Bezbožnik u Stanka* (The Godless at the Lathe). As the name implies, urban workers were the main target group. In 1924 *Bezbožnik* organized a Circle of Friends, *Obščestvo Druzej Gazety Bezbožnik*, re-christened the The Union of the Godless, *Sojuz Bezbožnikov* a year later; Yaroslavsky was at its head.¹⁰ A youth section was also set up, complete with its own paper *Junye Bezbožniki* (The Young Godless). To complement the general-readership paper, Yaroslavsky set up the monthly *Antireligioznik* (Antireligionist), in 1925, especially for senior atheist propagandists. A separate weekly under the name *Bezbožnik* also existed.

In April 1926, with the aim of ending internal dissension, the central Committee of the RCP organized a conference on atheist propaganda. Yaroslavsky's was confirmed as the correct scientific approach. The ‘leftist’ deviation was condemned for undervaluing the subjective side of religion and seeing it as nothing more than a class phenomenon. The ‘rightist’ deviation was censured for assuming too lightly that the spread of scientific knowledge would automatically banish religious prejudice. According to the conference, good anti-religious propaganda demanded background information on the world of believers — especially minorities — and was a long-term educational process.

Three more years would pass before the Union of Militant Godless would organize a second national conference on the subject. By that time Yaroslavsky had won what amounted to a monopoly in the propaganda struggle against religion. The Union took the opportunity to add the word *Militant* to its name *Sojuz Voinstvujuščich Bezbožnikov*. The Union was active on a broad front: large scale distribution of anti-church literature; lectures at work and school; posters and films, atheist excursions

to places of pilgrimage; university courses for future professional *antireligiozniki*; and the planning of new non-religious feast-days and civil ceremonies. In 1932 membership reached a record 5½ million. This was also the hey-day of the anti-religious press: the Soviet Union had no less than ten specialized newspapers and 23 periodicals. In the second half of the 1920s and during the 1930s the State Anti-Religious Publishing House, GAIZ, produced tens of books about the origins and history of the world's religions.¹¹

One rather special form of propaganda from the period deserves a mention, anti-religious education via displays in museums of atheism. In 1926, the Central Anti-Religious Museum of Moscow was the first of forty-five such establishments to be housed in former churches. The most famous would become the Museum of the History of Religion and Atheism, opened in 1932 in the erstwhile Kazan Cathedral in Leningrad. Leningrad's other celebrated cathedral, that of St Isaac, was also removed from the Orthodox Church for a similar purpose, but in 1937 was transformed into an 'ordinary' museum.

The Kazan Cathedral museum of atheism is the only one from the era of militant atheism to have survived later changes in the atheist propaganda line. It is now among the most important centres for the propaganda of atheism in the Soviet Union. Time has indeed brought changes to it. Religions were originally shown as objects of ridicule and gross generalization was the rule. Under the nine year directorship of V. Bonch-Bruyevich, (1946-1955), the museum grew into a centre for the Marxist-Leninist based study of the history of religions. Bonch-Bruyevich, who was highly knowledgeable on Russian religious denominations, built up the museum's library with precious incunabula and historical manuscripts on religious subjects. And yet, the manner in which religion was portrayed via displays of devotional, liturgical and penitential items, a replica of an inquisition torture chamber, satirical cartoons of the clergy, photos of weapons being blessed,

charts of the church's wealth and descriptions of the more bizarre sects, was primitive in the extreme. The museum underwent major change in 1980-81. Most items heaping ridicule on religion have gone, the museum no longer repels. There is now method in the approach, five sections cover: the origin of religion; Russian sects; the Russian Orthodox Church; freethinking and atheism in the West; and atheism in Russia and the Soviet Union. The other religions are dealt with in two annexes in Leningrad: a former Buddhist temple for Islam and the religions of the East and a former Armenian Catholic church for Roman Catholicism and the protestant denominations.

Despite the more businesslike approach the original aim of this unique museum network remains intact. In the words of the director, Dr Kozhurin, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary in 1982: "It is not simply a matter of looking at the items exhibited, the accompanying expert commentary is what matters . . . The purpose of our activities is to help form an atheist world outlook or, if you like, the nurturing of immunity to religion".¹² To these ends 600,000 visitors pass through the museum doors every year. For school groups in particular the visit is an item in the curriculum.

The fate of the Leningrad Museum of Atheism is all the more remarkable in that the other museums fell out of the running quite early on. Lack of direction, literally and figuratively, led to many premature closures. The remainder went during the war and the collections of religious artifacts were transferred from the Central Anti-religious Museum in Moscow with director Bonch-Bruyevich, to Leningrad in 1947. Khrushchev would later set up new museums of atheism in the famous Caves Monastery in Kiev, the former Dominican church in Lvov and what was once Vilna's Jesuit church, as a counter to strong local belief. Plans for four new museums and eleven atheist departments in local museums suggest that this propaganda medium against religion has not lost its importance.¹³

4. Church-State relations between 1941-1959

The outbreak of war with Germany also marked the opening of a new period in church/state relations. The Soviet government revised its anti-church policies and the Russian Orthodox Church began a period of notable recovery. Bociurkiw pithily typified the new policy as religious NEP: without actually abandoning ideological aims as such, pragmatic considerations determined the new policy.¹⁴ Stalin needed church support in the moral mobilization of the people against Hitler-Germany. He also wanted to take the wind out of the sails of the Germans who were re-opening numerous churches in occupied areas.

Anti-religious propaganda was halted in the Soviet Union. The Union of Militant Godless (in any case past its prime) was dissolved; anti-religious publications stopped; atheist museums closed their doors; and over the years thousands of church buildings were re-opened and priests appointed. In 1943, for the first since 1926, a small-scale episcopal synod was allowed to nominate a patriarch, Sergi, who died the following year; at the same time a new Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs was set up by the Council of People's Commissars; instead of being a purely political organ, the new body was also to represent church interests in government. Permission was given for a church information bulletin, *Žurnal Moskovskoj Patriarchii* – though, not surprisingly, circulation was limited and content subject to censorship.¹⁵ A church council in January 1945 accepted a new charter restoring the organizational framework of the Russian Orthodox Church: bishoprics were recognized as administrative units; parishes ceased to be the autonomous operations Soviet Government had made them; and the priest once again chaired his parish council although each council still had to request local authority for individual registration. Finally, in 1946, the seminaries were re-opened. The other religions, with the exception of Roman Catholicism,

also profited from the less hostile attitude: training schools for Muslim clergy were opened in Tashkent and Bukhara; and in 1944 a Council for (non-Russian Orthodox) Cult Affairs was set by the Council of People's Commissars.

During this entire period of state-church détente, up to the end of the 1950s, no new legislation was passed setting out the rights of the various religious groupings. What had in fact taken place was an informal concordat between Stalin and the patriarch – an agreement easily invalidated with a change in leadership. The strict legislation of 1929 and the years which followed remained in force, but the government was more supple in interpretation. New, more favourable regulations were introduced by the Soviet government, but never published: on 22nd August 1945 the Council of People's Commissars decided to allow the church to own means of transport, to manufacture liturgical objects and to receive income. This amounted to a limited grant of legal entity.¹⁶ The government's decision is referred to in a letter from the chairman of the Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs, G. Karpov to patriarch Alexi, dated 22nd August 1945. Only in 1975 was this regulation included in the amended 1929 Law on Religious Associations (art. 20, c). And that is precisely what makes it so important: hitherto dealings had been exclusively with parishes, now we see the first official Soviet Government recognition of those administrative units of the Russian Orthodox Church – the patriarchate and bishoprics.

But the Russian Orthodox Church paid a moral price for greater operational freedom: unconditional support of Soviet policy at home and abroad. The government would never again need to worry about criticism by church leaders, who were obliged to deny past persecution and dub Stalin "leader by divine right" and "the true defender of holy church".¹⁷

5. Towards a new form of atheist propaganda

The relative tolerance of state for church should not be taken as ideological reconciliation with religion by the communist government; nor even as a principal acceptance of religion as a private matter for the individual. Indeed atheist propaganda continued during the 1940s and 50s, but in a different manner: gone were the days of a separate anti-religious press and a militant mass-organization; the new approach called for general ideological education and information. On 27th September 1944 the Central Committee issued an instruction entitled, *On the Organization of Scientific-Educational Propaganda*, in which it noted that party and government organs had allowed their propaganda efforts among the people to lapse of recent years. Education commissars in individual republics, scientific organs, publishers, trade unions and the youth movement were exhorted once again to put shoulders behind the wheel of scientific-educational propaganda. The terms 'anti-religious' and 'atheist' are absent from the document, only 'natural-scientific' propaganda is mentioned. But among the stated aims are "victory over superstition and prejudice", invariable ideological jargon for religious beliefs. That these were the targets of the instruction is further confirmed by the themes set for the propaganda: the materialistic explanation for the creation of the universe, the origins of life and of man.

The new approach to atheist propaganda was also given form via the setting up of the Association for Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge – Knowledge (*Znanie*), for short – which took over from the Union of Militant Atheists. It organizes lectures, discussion evenings, popular scientific conferences, prints books, pamphlets and posters, and runs so-called People's Universities. It has sections in the work-place and in schools. The organizational network goes by town, district and republic.

Znanie works hand-in-hand with the propaganda section of the party secretariat at the relevant administrative level.

Alongside this popular-scientific approach to propaganda, the same period saw a start made in the organization of atheist propaganda at the academic level.¹⁸ The driving force was Bonch-Bruyevich. As well as being director of the atheist museum in Leningrad, in 1947 he also set up the History of Religion and Atheism Department of the Historical Institute of USSR Academy of Sciences. The first collection of articles, *Voprosy Istorii Religii i Ateizma*, appeared in 1950. Previously the Academy of Sciences had played no role in the propaganda of atheism — clearly this had not been recognized as a discipline in its own right. In the first instance there was more planning than action. In October 1954, Bonch-Bruyevich formed a coordinating committee in the Presidium of the Academy to promote research into atheism. A two year plan was inaugurated for the publication of a 'scientific atheist library'. Within a matter of months some 140 study projects had been submitted, only a few of which would actually come to anything in the long term. The yearbook, *Ežegodnik Muzeja Istorii Religii i Ateizma*, first published in 1957, was a more successful project.

Summer 1954, a year after Stalin's death, saw a short but heavy boom in anti-religious propaganda. On 24th July *Pravda's* main article called for an active struggle against religion. A virulent campaign against the church ensued, particularly in rural areas. Four months later, on 10th November, the Central Committee issued a resolution which to all intents and purposes ended the campaign. Years later it would transpire that, on 7th July, the Central Committee had adopted a secret resolution entitled, On the Serious Defects in Scientific-Atheist Propaganda and Measures for the Improvement thereof. Seemingly its tough tone made it unsuitable for publication at the time.¹⁹ The resolution referred to a noticeable increase in the influence of the Orthodox and other denominations on the people. Parti-

cular criticism was directed at the blooming religious life in the countryside. The celebration of religious feastsdays and increased numbers going on pilgrimages were especially worrying to the authorities: many thousands of man-hours wasted, general damage to the rural economy through mass slaughter of livestock and drunkenness. The resolution contrasted this religious revival with neglect of atheist propaganda by party and government organs. Especial censure was reserved for "the view that the liquidation of the class basis of the church in our country and the ending of the church's anti-revolutionary activities make active atheist propaganda unnecessary, and the idea that religious ideology will be spontaneously superseded, of its own accord, (*stichijno, samotěkom*) during the construction of communism". The resolution reiterated Lenin's statement that communist party could not accept religion as a private matter and condemned the 'neutralist, pacifist position' adopted by many trade union and komsomol organizations. It called for basic improvements and intensified anti-religious work via every political-ideological means of influence: lectures, speeches, personal conversations with believers, the press, radio, film and theatre. Lastly, the agitprop sections of the party, ministries of culture and education, *Znanie*, state publishing houses, press, the Academy of Sciences, the youth movement and trade unions were given a whole series of concrete measures to implement. The most important of these were:

- the training of an expert cadre of atheist *lektory* (people who give lectures);
- the organization of a one year plan for atheist literature and a two-year plan for anti-religious films;
- production of posters and slides;
- the setting up of the monthly *Nauka i Religija* (Science and Religion) by *Znanie*
- mass circulation of cheap editions of the works of Russian and foreign writers on atheism as well as fairy tales, folksongs and proverbs with an atheist message;

- the teaching of history, literature, chemistry and physics to be ‘loaded with atheist content’;
- the youth movement to put out special propaganda in sport and hobby clubs against young people who ‘are still under the influence of the church’;
- the trade unions to do the same for women.

It is significant that all concerned were ‘obliged’ to carry out their part of the plan with the exception of the Academy of Sciences, to whom the task of translating and publishing atheist writings from classical times and French Enlightenment was ‘suggested’.

Never before had the communist party put forward such detailed programme to propagate atheism. Possibly the plan went too far for some members of the central committee, in any case it soon got out of hand. A new resolution appeared on 10th November condemning such “flagrant mistakes” made in carrying out to the previous resolution as disturbing church services, offending the feelings of believers, spreading political mistrust of the clergy, administrative arbitrariness towards religious groupings, inept atheist propaganda telling nothing more than fables about the church. All this, according to the latest resolution, was in contravention of the constitution which guarantees every Soviet citizen’s freedom of conscience. Moreover, it was recalled that many believers were good Soviet citizens and that the Russian Orthodox Church differed from churches in capitalist countries. All the more reason that the anti-religious struggle in the Soviet Union should be confined to reasoning against the unscientific nature of the religious *Weltanschauung*, against the biblical tradition and outdated dogmas. This ideological struggle against religion was to be fought using the latest findings of astronomy, biology, physiology and other sciences confirming the rightness of the materialistic *Weltanschauung*. This scientific-atheist propaganda, so the resolution went on, could only be carried out by highly expert cadres made up of teachers, lecturers, doctors, agronomists,

physicists, literati and artists. It was to be clearly understood that recognition of past mistakes should not lead to any weakening of the scientific struggle against religion — that being an integral part of the communist education of the people.

From the Central Committee's swift about-face on the radical approach of the July resolution one can safely assume a difference of opinion among the party top and that church-related policy was part of the post-Stalin power struggle. Clearly Khrushchev had not yet sufficient power in 1954 to push through his hard line.²⁰ At the same time, it would be misleading to over emphasize the contrasts in the two party resolutions. Not only are they equal in their advocacy of atheist propaganda as a necessity, but the July document also brought lasting results — particularly as regards the contribution of the Academy of Sciences. Bonch-Bruyevich who had backed the July resolution, set up his co-ordinating committee in part in answer to that resolution.

The measures contained in the July resolution had in no way become outdated after 1958, when Khrushchev, party and government firmly in his grip, launched a new frontal assault on religious groupings, and published the resolution thought too harsh four years earlier.²¹

6. Additional legislation

The era of moderate *détente* between church and state ended with Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign which began in 1959 and lasted until his fall from power in 1964. In five years the orthodox church would lose most of the rights acquired since the war. As far as organizational development was concerned the situation deteriorated to that of the 1930s, the only exception being the continued tolerance of the central administrative bodies,

albeit bereft of most powers. Legislative-administrative clipping of wings was accompanied by an intensity of ideological propaganda against religion unseen since the 1920s. Between 1959 and 1964 the foundations were laid for scientific atheist propaganda as operation to this day.

Khrushchev's attitude to religion was deeply rooted in ideology, it missed the tactical tolerance which Stalin allowed himself at a time when religion long posed no direct political threat. Khrushchev's efforts to eradicate religion from Soviet society was inspired in part by the *idée-fixe* that total communism had to be achieved within twenty years. That aim required the disappearance of religion as the last vestige of the old society. There is, however, a shared element between Khrushchev's campaign and that of Stalin in the first half of the 1930s. Stalin's campaign against religion coincided with his economic leap forward in the first five year plan, aimed at accelerated industrialization of the Soviet Union; Khrushchev's ran parallel with a seven year plan to speed-up the laying of the 'material-technical basis' of communism.²²

Possibly one should also see Khrushchev's war on religion as a counter-weight to his proclamation of peaceful co-existence with capitalism, and as an attempt to redress the liberalizing effects of de-Stalinization. Whilst condemning Stalinism he wanted to restore the 'Leninist norms' in ideology.

The first signs of change in the state-religion relations appeared in 1959 with increasing media attacks: churches were accused of breaking the law on church-state separation; the bodies responsible for checking infringements were castigated for weakness; and there were calls for more active atheist propaganda. This was a psychological softening-up for the measures to follow. In early 1960, G. Karpov, chairman of the Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs was replaced by V. Kuroyedov, who would hold the post until 1985. Karpov had been the main exponent of Stalin's church policy since 1943. The Metropolitan

Nikolai, the liaison man between the patriarchate and the council, went at the same time. He was replaced by Bishop Nikodim. And the patriarch, who had earlier made gentle protests against the press attacks, was obliged to surrender his administrative functions to his deputy (and later successor), Pimen, after which his job became purely symbolic.²³ The Councils for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs and for (non-Orthodox) Cult Affairs dropped the liaison role between church groupings and state and resumed their strict governmental control function. With an eye to more stringent supervision, auxiliary committees for observance of the laws on religious grouping were set up by every local soviet. This meant a significant intervention in religious life: being locally based, the committees could follow every move made by clergy and congregation; no aspect of religious activity anywhere could now escape the eye of central authority in Moscow.²⁴

On 16th March 1961 the Councils for Russian Orthodox Church and Cult Affairs received a new Instruction on Implementation of Legislation on Religious Cults: the 1929 regulations were once to be enforced – and reinforced; henceforth it would be far more difficult for congregations to keep their place of worship open, indeed it became easier for government to close them down. And the instruction contained a new element: registration was upgraded from the task of municipal or village soviet to that of the district body. This was a form of centralization, it made the process more impenetrable and more complicated for ‘the twenty’ petitioners.

In April 1961 an episcopal synod of the Russian Orthodox Church was obliged to adjust its 1945 statutes to the new regulations. The two main changes involved parishes. The parish priest might no longer chair the parish council, nor indeed even be a member; his activities were confined to liturgical matters, and running the parish was to be left to the council members. Secondly, the parish council, and not the Bishop, would appoint

the priest in future. In short, the parish returned to the autonomous status of the 1930s with its priest dependant on a lay committee. It was now far easier for the authorities to infiltrate and manipulate the body which had organizational and financial control of the parish. The Patriarch and Bishops, released from their administrative duties, now acquired a mainly public relations function, immediately visible when government allowed the Russian Orthodox Church to join the World Council of Churches.²⁵

The fast growing Baptist community in the Soviet Union also fell victim to increased restrictions during this period. In 1961 the leadership of the Union of Evangelical Christians and Baptists was obliged to instruct their individual congregations to halt missionary activities and to limit, as far as possible, baptisms of persons under thirty.

In the main, those restrictive measures which hit all denominations equally concerned religion and youth. Young people below eighteen were not allowed to attend services; clergy were strictly forbidden to give them religious instruction; and parents were put under pressure by trade union, police, the courts etc. not to bring up their children in the faith. The clergy were obliged to report baptisms and church weddings to the police.²⁶ On the surface, the results of Khrushchev's administrative campaign against religion is best measured by the organizational regression of the Russian Orthodox Church. Of the 20,000 or more working church buildings in 1959, Khrushchev closed around 11000. Church closures went on up to 1966 by which time those left totalled slightly over 7000. The thousands of church closures were accompanied by dissolution of fifty-three out of sixty-nine monasteries by means of fiscal law and other administrative measures; where required, inmates were forcibly ejected. Five out of eight seminaries were also shut and a limit put on the numbers admitted to the remainder.

After the fall of Khrushchev in late 1964, the intensity of

the campaign gradually reduced. The first new church-policy decisions came in 1966: the two separate councils were amalgamated into the Council for Religious Affairs of the USSR Council of Ministers. The most important change to the statutes was that permission for the opening or closure of 'cult buildings' no longer came from district administrations but from the new council, and it alone. Registration ceased to be subject to that arbitrary local authority of which the Council for Cult Affairs had complained as early as 1964.²⁷ This marked the end of mass church closures, numbers were in any case reduced to a minimum. Underground church communities had been growing since 1961, particularly among the Baptists; the government intended this reinforcement of 'socialist legality' to be the means halting that growth.

The communist party under Brezhnev never openly criticized the ramifications of Khrushchev's anti-religious policies. The appointment of Kuroyedov, the man responsible for carrying out those policies, as chairman of the new council, was designed to show that there was no real break with the immediate past. The pattern of Soviet state-church relations established by Khrushchev became the status quo. The only relevant legal legislative step taken in Brezhnev's time was a 1975 amendment to the 1929 law on religious associations, under which Khrushchev's regulations – bans on services in the home and the involvement of clergy and hierarchy in financial management of parish or bishopric – were formally included.²⁸

Restrictions on church activities, and in particular the challenge to growing interest in religion among youth and intelligentsia, continued in 1970s and into the early 1980s. It is true, however, that this anti-religious policy operated with a lower profile and better legal camouflage. In the course of the 1970s, with an eye to reinforcing the image of legality, the Soviet government published a number of slim volumes explaining the laws on religion in a practical manner for the first time. Although the

many government instructions to the Council for Religious Affairs and the Council's reports back to government remained strictly classified (*dlja služebnogo pol'zovanija*), several of these remarkable documents have leaked through to the West.²⁹

The conspiratorial attitude of the Soviet government towards legislation on religion says more about its interpretation of religious freedom than the laws themselves – for all their stringency. This same secrecy offers great potential for manipulation of the law. In the area of religious legislation, Soviet jurisprudence displays an ability to clothe with the dignity of law a policy which breaches one of its own principles, to wit the separation of church and state. Indeed, such was clear from the first: the very decree of separation of church and state declared all real estate pertaining to the former, forfeit to and property of the latter. The church was thus dependent on the state for the loan of premises under conditions set by the state. But an even more severe incursion in the life of the church was its demotion in law to the status of 'cult association', and the consequent definition of religious instruction as 'religious propaganda', subject to criminal prosecution. The constitution of 1977 retained the Stalinist formulation of religious freedom, "freedom to perform religious cults and freedom to make anti-religious propaganda", virtually in tact, only substituting "atheist" for "anti-religious" (par. 54). The following chapter looks at the nature of atheist propaganda since the sixties.

Notes

1. The Party resolutions and governmental decrees on atheist propaganda quoted in this chapter can be found in *O Religii i Cerkvi: sbornik vyskazyvanij klassikov marksizma-leninizma, dokumentov KPSS i*

sovetskogo gosudarstva (1981), where they appear in chronological order.

2. O. Luchterhandt (1976), 52-53. Legislation on religion is laid out in toto in V.A. Kuroedov/A.S. Pankratov, sost., (1971). This classified work has never been made public in the Soviet Union but, in 1976 it leaked to the West. A new edition has since been published in the United States, Chalidze Publications, New York, 1981. Some of the secret legislation had already been published in Paris by I.R. Šafarevič (1973). New information acquired in 1976 is included in a second study by Luchterhandt (1978): this work forms the basis for juridic elements in Chapter IV of this book.
3. Luchterhandt (1978), 13.
4. Luchterhandt (1978), 19.
5. The following statistics on the Russian Orthodox Church are generally accepted:

	1914	1941
Church buildings	54,400	4,200
Priests	57,00	5,600
Monasteries	1,498	38
Seminaries	57	Nil
Bishops	130	4

See J. Meyendorff (1960), 135.

6. The re-publishing of *Biblija dlja Verujuščich i Neverujuščich* in 1975 with a fulsome foreword is evidence that today's 'scientific' atheism in the Soviet Union does not shy away from primitive approach of the 1920s. The book, a commentary on the old testament, and in particular the pentateuch, represents both an outdated manner of rationalistic bible criticism and the coarser school of propaganda. The 'godlet of the Jews' is depicted as a sad case indeed: divine creation of light is contrasted unfavourably with the powers of the Soviet proletarian who needs but flick a switch (20-21). In discussing Deuteronomy 23, verses 1 and 2-14 the style rises to the level of smut (303-305); boorish fantasies of this ilk pepper the entire oeuvre.
7. These reports can also be found in a book published by Russian emigrées, whose title is taken from *Izvestija's* commentary on the anti-religious carnival. A. Valentinov (1924). 106-113.
8. Exhumation of the corpses of Saints to demonstrate decomposition was regarded as an empirical-scientific proof aimed at curtailing venera-

- tion. Lenin gave his blessing to this scientific approach. In 1919 P. Krasikov wrote to inform him the remains of saints interred at the Troitse-Sergievsky Monastery had been dug up and a film made of the proceedings. Lenin replied that "those responsible must ensure that the film is shown throughout Moscow". Lenin (1958), vol. 38, 535. Also see p. 522 where Lenin agrees to the opening of further saints' graves. That this form of 'scientific' propaganda is regarded as valid as ever appears from the continued display of still photographs from the film in the re-modernized museum of atheism in Leningrad.
9. The description of this struggle is taken from J. Delaney Grossman (1971), 114-122.
 10. For a recent and detailed study of the history of the union of the godless see A. Burg (1985).
 11. Press statistics come from *Ateističeskij Slovar'* (1983), 39.
 12. O. Brušlinskaja/I. Žernevskaia (1983), 9.
 13. *ibidem*.
 14. Bociurkiw (1970), 92.
 15. For the history and current operation of this publication see V. Stepanov (1983).
 16. Luchterhandt (1978), 41.
 17. Bociurkiw (1970), 95.
 18. For Bonč-Brujevič's role see J. Delaney Grossman (1973), 378-379; *Ateističeskij Slovar'*, 39-40.
 19. The July resolution was first published in *Voprosy Ideologičeskoj Raboty* (Moscow 1961). It has since been included in the collected edition of party documents and in *O religii i Cerkvi* (1981).
 20. According to Grossman (1973) there was a link between the July resolution's strong accent on the rural population and Khrushchev's efforts to improve agricultural production. Churchgoing, religious feastdays and mass pilgrimages were considered counterproductive for agriculture — hence the campaign began at harvest time.
 21. See note 19.
 22. Luchterhandt (1978), 24.
 23. Luchterhandt (1978), 26.
 24. The actual workings of the Council for Religious Affairs and local auxiliary committees are well described in A. Boiter (1980), 45-53 and 62-64.
 25. Luchterhandt (1978), 31.
 26. Soviet jurists recognize that, given separation of church and state, the church may not "demand" the passport at baptism, though it may "take

note of" such official documents as the believer "shows voluntarily".
See G.R. Gol'st (1975), 33.

27. Luchterhandt (1978), 33-35.

28. G. Simon (1977).

29. See V.G. Furov (1979), an important document dealing with legal measures to limit church activities and listing bishops by political loyalty. For recent history see J. Ellis (1986).

Study and Propaganda of Atheism in Modern Soviet Society

1. The term 'scientific atheism'

The current set-up of Soviet atheist propaganda dates from late 1950s and early 1960s. The militant atheism of the inter-war years and the — in official parlance — neglect of atheist propaganda during the era of personality cult, were followed by the impetus of Khrushchev's initiative. The campaign of 1959-1964 followed a false start in 1954. The full-scale assault on religion involved both political-administrative persecution of church organization and an ideological-propaganda attack on religion in the minds of the people.

The communist party's new approach to atheist propaganda was classified as 'scientific atheism', not that it meant any fundamental departure from the past. Party literature talked of, 'a new step' in scientific atheism.¹ The foregoing period was not condemned as unscientific, on the contrary, the message was continuity. Of course, such was long time common practice among the compilers of Soviet history: criticism of individuals and episodes neither implies nor involves doubt in the ever-soaring course of ideological tradition. Soviet history is re-written in the light of new ideological insights and expedience. And so, the new scientific approach to atheism was pre-dated back to the 1920s and represented as 'restoration of Leninist norms' (a key concept in Khrushchev's general attempt to win back ideological credibility after de-Stalinization). Of the six men held up as the grand-old-men, the pioneers of scientific atheism — A. Lunacharsky,

P. Krasikov, N. Krupskaya, I. Skvortsov-Stepanov, Y. Yaroslavsky and B. Bonch-Bruyevich, all contemporaries and colleagues of Lenin – only the last was directly involved in the refinement of atheist propaganda. Yaroslavsky's inclusion is remarkable: his Union of the Militant Godless was no more scientific than were his writings.²

A review of atheist studies in the magazine *Voprosy Filosofii* went to considerable lengths in pointing out continuity between modern Soviet atheism and that of the 1920s.³ Without the shadow of a blush the article stated that "Leninist principles of atheist upbringing" were embodied and realized in the Union of Militant Godless and its two periodicals *Bezbožnik* and *Antireligioznik* (The Antireligionist) as well as the magazines *Revoljucija i Cerkov'* (Revolution and Church), *Ateist* (The Atheist) and *Pod Znamenem Marksizma* (Under the Banner of Marxism). *Bezbožnik u Stanka* (The Godless at the Lathe) was alone in being criticized for "deviation from Leninist principles, primitiveness and injury to the feelings of believers". The 1940s and 50s were characterized as the period which lacked a "creative approach" to atheism – with a "revival of the theoretical approach" from 1954 onwards.

And so, just as militant atheism can be qualified as 'scientific', the term militant is by no means the exclusive prerogative of the first stage of Soviet atheism. Calls for scientific atheism to be combative and for the theory to be turned into militant propaganda, occur increasingly in contemporary writings. This linking of theory and practice is at the very heart of Soviet atheism, this is what distances it from 'bourgeois' atheism. Bourgeois atheism is theoretical and private whereas Soviet atheism has a socio-political dimension.

The validity of the expression 'militant atheism' in modern times was the theme of another article in *Voprosy Filosofii*.⁴ The title, *O Voinstvujuščem Materializme* (On Militant Materialism) referred to a similarly named publication by Lenin,

his "atheist will and testament", as it is commonly known. The article made an impassioned call for atheist propaganda to employ Leninist methodology characterized as this is above all by "a militancy and irreconcilability towards all forms of idealism and religion. And that means that materialism organically reaches that consequence and perfection which in the language of philosophy is called – militant atheism". The author went on to set right several misunderstandings: use of the term was not to be confined to that period when the church was still in political opposition to the Soviet system; and loss of church influence in society did not make an anachronism out of calls for militancy. Anyone believing the contrary was according to the article, guilty of over-simplifying and vulgarizing the concept of militancy – a deviation from the Marxist-Leninist view of what is scientific. Militant was to be taken as neither an administrative liquidation of the church nor a *Kulturkampf* in the Bismarck mould, nor, yet again, offending the feelings of the faithful. What it did mean was an uncompromising attitude towards religion on the level of *Weltanschauung* and winning the hearts and minds of believers from a false philosophy.

The article went on to cover the then significance of the 'militant' concept at the international level: Soviet atheists were to combat Western Marxist's conciliatory attitude towards religion, they were not to be misled by the process of renewal within Western churches nor by those churches altered standpoints on scientific and social questions: a dialogue twixt Marxism and Christianity was to be seen as the first move in assault on the monolithic integrity of Marxist theory. *Voprosy Filosofii* recognized that the circumstances of atheist propaganda in the Soviet Union had undergone major change. In half a century, religious belief had become an anachronism, socially and psychologically isolated in an overwhelmingly atheist community. Even so, the continued existence of religious groupings proved the continued relevance of Lenin's ideas on atheist education. Readers

were reminded that adjustment by the churches to the Soviet system, and their active role in the struggle for peace, only served to obscure the incompatibility of religion and communism. The minority position of believers, and their consequent retreat into the laager mentality, was described as a further complication, making them less vulnerable to propaganda. At the same time, atheism needed to be reinforced among unbelievers who all too often held it as an opinion only, rather than a conscious conviction.

Considerable space went to the tolerant attitude of youth to religion – now the theme of a permanent item in modern Soviet atheist programme. *Voprosy Filosofii* warned that the young, never having known the church as oppressor, were drawn by its novelty (*neobičnost'*), its colourful liturgy, and its striking architecture and paintings. Alas, not all were able to discriminate between the religious and the aesthetic, the ecclesiastic and the wordly legacy: such could result in serious involvement in religion. *Voprosy Filosofii* detected the same lack of discrimination, even mild sympathy, among certain writers, poets and film makers whose work was too fond of religious imagery, expressions and attributes. Some historians and literary critics were similarly tainted by over pre-occupation with Russia's religious past and idealization of the church's role in moulding the Russian character. The article closed with a call for philosophers and atheists to fight shoulder-to-shoulder in the struggle to solve for a number of new problems in atheist propaganda, specifically this meant:

- research into the socio-psychological causes for the continued existence of religion in Soviet society;
- the working-out of a philosophy of the human personality, the question of the meaning of life, the question of good and evil;
- fundamental re-thinking of ethical and aesthetical values.

Fearing, perhaps, that the point might not yet have sunk in, the editors added a closing section. Here, the terms 'militant

atheist' and 'militant atheism' cropped up no less than seven times and extra emphasis was given to the need for communist and communism to adopt an 'irreconcilable', 'implacable' and 'consciously and passionately uncompromising attitude towards religion'.

So much for modern Soviet atheism's view of itself. Now for the question of Soviet atheism's right to scientific status and whether or not it is a form of science of religion. This question has already been covered in Chapter 3 section 5, and we now move on to detail.

2. The difference with science of religion

If Soviet atheism calls itself a science — and the only true science in the area of religion, this claim must be seen in the light of Soviet ideology's concept of science. This is an esoteric concept which a priori declares itself closed to external (bourgeois) criticism.

The Soviet concept of scholarship presupposes a belief in communist ideology. If you do not share this basis, neither can you share the tenets of Soviet scientific atheism. Even the 'bourgeois' atheist and agnostic will be at a loss to recognize themselves in the dogmatic opinions of the Soviet atheist. Unlike the sociological science of religion and non-Marxist philosophical theories on god, Soviet scientific atheism makes no attempt at being an emotionless, neutral study of the phenomenon religion and of god as a question of philosophy. It is a deliberately partisan reflexion on these subjects, with an unchangeable or inflexible interpretational framework. The said social phenomenon is approached from one direction only — that of historic materialism and the philosophic questioning from dialectical materialism.

Scientific debate is sealed at the starting point and conclusion. Within, there is the possibility of marginal variation and diverse nuance. The armour admits neither new discoveries nor unforeseen questions — a contradiction of the very nature of science. At the end of the day it is the ideology, the basic philosophical option which rules whether an argument is valid and permissible, and not the intellectual creativity of the individual seeker. This then is the first reason why Soviet atheism cannot be called scientific.

Alongside its methodological limitations, there is a second reason why Soviet scientific atheism cannot be called a science of religion. Modern science of religion does not study the phenomenon of religion in order to refute or reinforce it, but out of pure scientific curiosity. Soviet atheism lacks this autonomous scientific motivation, instead there is a definite political aim, namely to combat religion, to limit its influence. Soviet science, as it touches on religion, is part of the 'ideological struggle' — an instrument of political socialization.

Just as Soviet ideologists see no problem in qualifying their atheism as 'scientific' they are equally confident in laying exclusive claim to the title of "science of religion" (*religiovedenie*), for their studies in this area. Naturally, as Marxists, they are careful to distance themselves from practitioners of 'bourgeois' science of religion. The *Atheist Dictionary* defines the matter as follows: "The theoretical-methodological side of bourgeois science of religion deserves uncompromising and sharp criticism from Marxists. However, this does not mean that Marxists may not make discriminating use of data collected by bourgeois science of religion, of some elements of its conclusions, and of its methods for empirical research." Specifically, "Marxist science of religion involves the application of dialectical-materialistic methods to the study of religion . . . and, as such, is an integral part of scientific atheism." Its aim is clearly stated: "to indicate realistic ways to achieve victory over religion".⁵

This is indeed the *raison d'être* of the Soviet scientific study of religion; the motive and aim is victory (*preodelenie*) over religion just as a disease is studied in order to find a cure. Soviet science studies the phenomenon of religion because it is an evil, negative phenomenon — pure scientific curiosity is absent. Scientific atheism in the Soviet Union was born out of political considerations with the state as midwife. Moreover, it is not a merely private but a state-atheism. In fact, Soviet scientific atheism is every bit as much an imposition as 'typographic atheism' which prohibits the printing or writing of a capital 'G' in the word 'God'.⁶

From the standpoint of epistemology, one is obliged to call Soviet atheism ideological, and not scientific. The epistemological status of this ideological atheism can be likened to that of another academic discipline operating from a pre-scientific belief-base, namely theology. Scientific theology and Soviet scientific atheism both aim at the rationalization of an existential choice relating to the concept of God. In both 'sciences' the researcher's basic philosophical option and his commitment to a given *Weltanschauung* play a decisive role in social interpretation and philosophic evaluation of that subject. Ideological atheism is a reversed theology, an anti-theology the practice of which demands absolute unbelief as pre-requisite on the part of the researcher.

This subjective standpoint, shared by theology and ideological atheism, marks a common difference from the science of religion which makes no explicit judgement on the truth of the religion or doctrine examined. It is, in principle, a neutral science. Theology and ideological atheism may both use the science of religion as an auxiliary to confirm their findings, indeed such happens regularly. Anthropological, religio-psychological, religio-historical and religio-phenomenological data are all interpreted in a manner according to the desired end: justification of Marxist–Leninist or Christian doctrine. In conclusion, it is true to say that Soviet ideological atheism is scientific — but then with the same epistemological status as theology.

That Soviet atheism shows an epistemological kinship to the religious attitude is a mere paradox. The similarity is a logical consequence of Soviet ideology's function as religion substitute, which in turn confers a religiomorphous character on that ideology as a whole. That Soviet ideology is by its nature a religion substitute is clear from its active struggle against religion. In fact, the pre-occupation with 'God' and the scientific atheist argumentation are the most fundamental religio-morphous aspects of Soviet Marxist-Leninist ideology. Not only the epistemological pre-conditions but also the concrete argumentation show an often striking resemblance to theological contention.⁷

But, there is an even deeper paradox. Soviet atheism's ideological and reversed-theological argumentation against religious belief justifies itself *malgré lui*, precisely because its methods are unscientific. The only way to refute the concept of God is tackle it on the same level – and not to brush it aside. Not being a science, religious belief cannot be refuted on scientific grounds.

Only the statement of a rock-solid disbelief over and against religion is capable of combating religion; only an ideology set in the place of religion can oust religion. Hence the expansion of atheist studies by Soviet ideologists since the 1950s; hence their raising of the ideological battle against religion above the mundane political agitation of militant atheism to the academic-propaganda level of 'scientific atheism'.

3. The organization of scientific atheism

The ideological atheism of the communist party is constitutionally anchored in Soviet society; it is the official philosophy of life taught in schools and universities. Ideological atheism's constitutionally privileged position was considerably reinforced be-

tween 1959 and 1964; propaganda and the study of atheism were re-organized, and the new structure has remained. Khrushchev's measures relating to atheism formed the mould for its future development in the Soviet Union.

The five-year period saw the introduction of those measures decided in the July and November 1954 resolutions of the Central Committee. New impetus was also given by the 21st and 22nd Party Congresses; both wanted a faster cut-back of religion by *Znanie* and the Central Committee, as part of an accelerated drive to build communism. In January 1964 the Central Committee gave its agreement to an atheist programme as set out by the party's ideological committee.

1959 saw the first organizational involvement of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in the campaign to promote atheism. Bonch-Bruyevich's pioneering work had included the setting up of a section devoted to the history of religion and atheism in the Academy's historical institute in 1947: now a co-ordinating board for the study of atheism was set up within the department of economic, philosophic and legal sciences of the presidium, so too were atheist sections in the institutes of philosophy, ethnography and oriental studies. Chairs of history and theory of atheism were founded at the universities of Moscow and Kiev, a trend later followed by other universities. In 1959 scientific atheism was added to the curriculum in institutes of higher education. Such was the initial lack of interest by students that since 1964 the subject has been compulsory. The total course is made up of twelve lectures.

A central Committee decree dated 5th May 1959 announced the publication of a popular scientific magazine *Nauka i Religija* (Science and Religion). The first number appeared the following year. The Ukraine got its own edition, *Vojovnyčyj Atejist* (The Militant Atheist), a title altered to *Ljudyna i Svit* (Man and the World), in 1965. On 15th February 1960 the Central Committee announced a new atheist textbook for higher education, *Osnovy*

Naučnogo Ateizma (The Fundamentals of Scientific Atheism) which was published a year later. Secondary schools were soon provided with a similar book.

All these educational innovations and publicity campaigns required a cadre of “anti-religious specialists” (*specialisty-antireligiozniki*) and a central regulatory body to oversee scientific research and orthodox doctrinal instruction. Such had been foreseen in the Central Committee’s 1964 report, *Concerning Measures to Reinforce Atheist Education of the People*. This completed the re-organization of atheist propaganda.⁸

The measures announced included the setting-up of the Institute for Scientific Atheism as part of the Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee of the CPSU. Its task was to be the co-ordination of matters relating to atheism in the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, the universities and bodies falling under the ministry of culture. At the same time, the Academy of Sciences was called on to be more active involved in the scientific study of atheism and the propaganda thereof. The new institute was to publish a half-yearly series under the heading *Voprosy Naučnogo Ateizma* (Questions of Scientific Atheism).

These would replace two existing series on the same subject: *Voprosy Istorii Religii i Ateizma* (Questions of the History of Religion and Atheism) published by the Historical Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences, and the *Ežegodnik* (Yearbook) of the Leningrad Museum of Atheism.

The document devoted special attention to the training of atheist cadres. From 1964 onwards, a proportion of students studying philosophy at university and history and humanities at advanced teacher training were to specialize in scientific atheism. The Fundamentals of Scientific Atheism were also to be an examination subject for everyone studying at university, medical, agricultural and teacher training colleges. Seminars on atheism and examinations on ‘atheism in practice’ were to be given at all schools in the health care, cultural education and teaching sectors.

Sciences and humanities alike were to have a stronger atheist line. Lastly, a nation-wide network of atheist study circles was to be set-up to train local cadres, in particularly: local officials, doctors, trade union officials, youth workers, journalists, all grades of school teachers, members of women's organizations, flat and pensioner's committees; areas where religion still had a hold being a special priority.

The latter half of the party document covered the role of artists, the media, museums, health care institutions and premises of local soviets in atheist propaganda. Film, literature, the stage and graphic arts were all to create more works with an atheist theme. More brochures and books were to be published for the benefit of specific religious groupings and social categories. More atheist subjects were to dealt with in periodicals like *Questions of Philosophy*, *The Agitator*, *Knowledge is Power*, *Health*, *Nature*, and *The Female Kolchoz Worker*. Radio and television were to broadcast regular programmes on atheism. Regional museums, planetariums and mobile exhibitions were to be involved. Hospitals, maternity and infant care clinics, and sanatoriums were to give more atheist counselling. Introduction of the so-named a-religious, socialist ceremonies for naming the new-born, issuing the first passport and marriage, were to be speeded up. Civil registry officials, trade unionists and ethnographers were to co-operate in designing attractive ceremonies. Where possible, 'palaces of happiness' were to be built to this end.

Finally the party called for intensified anti-religious work among the young, in and out of school: extra atheist content in regular lessons; the setting up of atheist sections in youth clubs; the organizing of excursions, film evenings and plays with an anti-religious theme. Moreover, regulations prohibiting the clergy from mixing with the young and forbidding parental duress in religious observance were to be more stringently observed.

Thus far the summary of new measures listed in this communist party document. The thoroughness is striking: each and every

institution in society — from the Academy of Sciences to maternity clinics — are given a list of atheist missionary tasks, or as the official jargon has it, “the formation of atheist consciousness among the people”. Whether they all achieve their goals in another matter. Subsequent party statements and press articles are rife with complaints against neglect or half-heartedness in the atheist propaganda campaign by given bodies or in a given area but, more on this later.

Far reaching and thorough though it might have been in listing institutions, the 1964 document omits the largest Soviet organization of all. This organization, proudly considering itself “the most effective school for atheism”, is the Soviet military. Presumably the military was not included because its programme of atheist education was taken for granted; in the Soviet armed forces ideological indoctrination has long since eradicated the boarder dividing individuality from collectivism. The degree of indoctrination can be judged from the article *Ateističeskoe Vospitanie Voinov* (Atheist Education of Soldiers) in a magazine for military cadres.⁹ Alongside the general requirement for atheist propaganda in Soviet society as a whole, there is a special reason for combating religion in the armed forces lying in: “the negative influence of religious prejudices on the formation of the political morale and psychological qualities needed in battle . . . These prejudices involve ideas of abstract pacifism, religious humanism, unnatural love of the enemy, lack of resistance to evil, the anti-patriotic nature of the doctrine of a heavenly fatherland and the concept of military service as evil.”¹⁰

The motivation of atheist propaganda in the armed forces clearly illustrates the practical-political aims of that propaganda. Religion is a stumbling block preventing government from making state and fatherland the highest criteria in the citizen's scale of ethical values. This practical approach is central to atheist propaganda. Hence the 1964 package gave priority to the organizational linking of theoretical study and practical propaganda

of atheism in the Institute for Scientific Atheism. The aim of broad scientific apparatus set up by the Academy and universities was to extend beyond the autonomous field of purely scientific research to active propaganda of atheism. All this helps explain L.F. Ilyichev's criticism of the scientific community in 1964: he accused them of "academicism", of "flight into the depths of the past and to exotic locales: writing reams on the religions of Africa, Australia and the Pacific but producing little in the way of solid studies on the state of religion in the Soviet Union".¹¹

4. Unity of school and family

In the Soviet view, just as the inter-relation of science and propaganda goes without saying, so does that twixt school and family when it comes to atheist education. Religious education is forbidden in the Soviet Union, only seminarists may be so instructed and then only in designated premises. The clergy are not allowed to give private instruction to citizens whose only option is to learn of religion during religious services. However, parents are permitted to give their children religious instruction; in practice this does not mean freedom from interference.

The most important argument against religious instruction in the home is the link between education in the family and at school. At school Soviet children receive communist-ideological training: it would be illogical for them to get a contradictory philosophical message at home. And, according to Soviet educationalists, it is psychologically irresponsible to confuse a child with on the one hand scientific communism and on the other unscientific religion. To do so could result in a spiritual split (*dvoedušie, razdvoennost' soznaniia*) and consequent psychological damage to the growing child: parents should be aware of their

responsibility in this respect, and constitutional freedom of religion is no excuse for religious instruction.

Here we see a clear and fundamental tension between the letter and spirit of the Soviet constitution. Hardly surprisingly, the problem is solved to the advantage of the ideological spirit of the law as shown in the catechism-like booklet *Religija i Zakon* (Religion and the Law), published in 1975: "It is quite true that the law does not forbid parents to give their children religious instruction. But what sort of upbringing is it when certain religious parents give their children the idea that everything has a divine originate as opposed to the real scientific knowledge they receive at school? This creates a split leading to spiritual, inner confusion and serious damage during the development of human personality. Hence the importance of working systematically to clarify to the people the duty and responsibility of parents in bringing up their children".¹²

Government guidelines and legislation on education treat as obvious parents' moral obligation to bring up their children as atheists. The Marriage and Family Codex of the RSFSR states that "parents must bring up their children in the spirit of the moral codex of the builder of communism". And, the civil wedding ceremony makes it quite clear that the family functions as a cell of communist education.¹³ This very point of unity between family and school, i.e. the subjection of one to the other, was also aimed at in the 1984 educational reforms. Paragraph 13 of the new school law formulated the atheist aims of education as follows: "In education it is important that all subjects, both in the social and in the natural sciences, cultivate solid materialistic ideas and atheist insight among pupils, the ability to interpret natural and social phenomena correctly and to function in accordance with the principles of our *Weltanschauung*."¹⁴ That upbringing in the parental home ought not to diverge from said aims was clear from party leader Chernenko's speech recommending the law to the plenary session of the Central Committee

in April 1984. He emphasized that schools should impart the Marxist–Leninist *Weltanschauung* to their pupils and “cultivate a lasting immunity against alien concepts and morals. And no different lesson may be taught within the family . . . No good can be expected of learning one thing at school and another at home.”¹⁵

Part of Soviet teachers’ job description is to involve indifferent or unwilling parents in the atheist education of their children. Special manuals lay down precisely and methodically how they should go about it.¹⁶ For a start, teachers are to neutralize the influence of religious parents. Next, they must try to win over those parents to a loyal position vis-a-vis atheist education at school. And, as a final stage, the parents themselves are to converted to atheism via what the manual calls “the individual approach”, a method demanding much in the way of tact, patience and psychological insight. The teacher needs to reconnoitre deep into family territory, into what parents think, into their socio-behavioural patterns. Relevant information comes via the child, for instance by having him or her write a composition on family matters or on a religious theme, by asking questions in class which expose the parents’ interests, by talking directly with the child and by involving non-believers in the family. Lastly, the teacher is instructed to involve the child in providing religious parents or grandparents with information on atheism. This can be done by supplying literature and natural-scientific works with an anti-religious bent to be read at home and touching on themes for discussions on religion. Should a teacher be convinced of ‘religious compulsion’ (as unrepentant religious education is called) by parents, it becomes his duty to inform the relevant authorities.

Breaching the integrity of the family to promote atheist propaganda among children displays realism on the part of government. The Soviet authorities’ avowed intention of combating religious thought and values targets the very roots. Once school, media

and church are removed from the picture only the family remains as bringer of religious knowledge and values to the young within Soviet society. Statist Soviet ideology — of which atheism is an integral part — is obliged to invade the last refuge of the citizen's own values, the last bulwark against the spiritual monopoly of the state.

5. Social control

Social control is an important means of promoting atheism in society. This control is already strongly present in the collectivist Soviet society. But it is further stimulated when aimed at religious life by means of the many group sessions Soviet citizens must attend in the workplace or as part of the educational system. Groups discuss the 'anti-social' behaviour of fellow members who are subject to 'comradely verdicts'. Only rarely does this come from the group as a whole, mostly the initiative comes from above, from the party members or Komsomol cadres who usually form the leadership of the collective. Indeed, within the party and Komsomol, social conduct is especially closely monitored by all concerned; social control does not really apply here, it is replaced by a more stringent, deeper group pressure. A taint of religion in the life of party and Komsomol members is condemned as a direct breach of the group code. The statutes of both organizations embrace "active struggle against religious prejudices and other remnants of the past" among their aims. Such is the atmosphere in party and youth movement that it is shameful for members to attend a church service or wear crosses; so to do is grounds for public criticism and, depending on the gravity of the offence, sanctions involving the career. Controls within the Communist cadre groups also extend to members'

family and friends: a party leader can be expelled because his son-in-law sings in a church choir.¹⁷ Thus the group control medium works in two directions – towards members and non-members. Lenin was unequivocal in stating that a party member could not be a religious believer and the slogan “every Komsomolers a militant atheist” is as relevant as ever.¹⁸

Given that the smaller the community the more effective the social control and the traditional strength of religion in the countryside, considerable effort goes into building up ‘atheist public opinion’ (*ateističeskoe obščestvennoe mnenie*) in rural communities, in kolchozes, sovchozes and in villages. As is cryptically formulated: “A well formed atheist public opinion can stimulate religious believers to active social and cultural work and involve them in the interests of socialist collectives”¹⁹

Soviet ideological literature regularly mentions – and not without pride – the achievement of mass-atheism in the Soviet Union. In so doing it is put on record that religion has all but ceased to multiply via organized channels thanks to the separation of church and state, though it continues to flourish along individual routes. Hence the call for the anti-religious struggle to be carried to the believer himself – the previously mentioned ‘individual approach’. Not that this indicates recognition of the individual, under the paradoxical semantic of Soviet ideology this means intensified social pressure on him. It is a refined method of collectivizing the individual believer into the corral of mass-atheism.

The modern school of atheist education increasingly calls for “the individual elaboration of the believer” as it is also called. The first extensive article in favour came from one of Khrushchev’s chief party ideologists, L.F. Ilyichev, in the party organ, *Kommunist*.²⁰ The individual approach requires that the propagandists can talk with authority on the target’s religion rather than religion in general. In the first place this demands a specialized study of the religion in question taking regional variations into account. Se-

condly, the individual approach calls for psychological technique: injured sensibilities must be avoided as counter-productive — strengthening resistance and destroying the credibility of the propagandist. Belief, according to Ilyichev, is less a rational-theoretical matter than one of emotion, having a primary function in a sense of emotional well-being. Hence, in combating religion, not only must the scriptures be scientifically debunked but the individual's emotions also need working on — an area which Ilyichev says demands “an infinitely subtler approach”. Atheist propaganda is more than transferring knowledge, it is a matter of educational work.

The intensity of Soviet atheist propaganda, the social pressure and invasion of private life can only be explained in terms of its aim. Within the general aim of political socialization of the citizen and his total integration into the ideological monoculture this specific aim is designated as training the citizen to have an “atheist consciousness” (*ateističeskoe soznanie*). This differs from “areligious consciousness” (*bezreligioznoe soznanie*) which is merely negative — the absence of belief in the supernatural and far from being active atheist commitment. Areligious consciousness is seen as typical of modern Western capitalist societies where many have also broken with religion: it springs from scepticism, agnosticism or indifference. Atheist consciousness, in contrast, is based on philosophic materialism, it is a conviction involving social and political consequences. The attitude resulting from atheist consciousness is designated “atheisticity” (*ateističnost'*), which again differs from unbelief, lack of religion (*bezreligioznost', nereligioznost'*). The *Atheist Dictionary* provides a definition: “the presence in the individual of a certain totality of atheist knowledge and insight, conviction in that truth, willingness to bear witness to their knowledge and insight, adoption of a resolute atheist position in relevant situations, the purposeful carrying out of atheist work and the bringing up of children in the atheist spirit.”²¹

In conclusion one can state that the system of atheist education and training set up in the 1960s is perfectly organized – on paper. Its less than perfect performance in practice is borne out by periodic complaints in the Party about “weakening of atheist work”; these involve both slow execution of decisions and the growth of a tolerant attitude to religion. The last Central Committee decree specially devoted to atheism (16th July 1971) particularly criticized the fact that “some publications, films and television programmes use religious rites and church ceremonies without any clear reason. It even occurs that certain communists and komsomol members distance themselves from the struggle against religious prejudices and take part in religious services.”²² During the 1970s and early 1980s similar complaints were a regular feature in press and party literature. At the plenary session of the central committee in June 1983, Chernenko, at that time speaking for and on behalf of Party leader Andropov, found it necessary to warn against “‘god-seeking’ themes creeping into literature”. His address continued in the same tone: “ideological work among such a specific group as believers may not be weakened. A section of the people and – let us be honest – not such a small section, is still influenced by religion.”²³ One year later, in December 1984, Mikhail Gorbachev, at that time speaking for and on behalf of Party leader Chernenko, was not slow to pick up the thread: he stated the importance of atheist education, using the expression, “patriotic and atheist education” to sum up, in his own manner, the link between statism and atheism.²⁴

This sort of criticism, and the frequency with which it crops up, points to what has been called a “religious renaissance” in the Soviet Union. The term is overdone. There is a definite and growing interest among the intelligentsia for the phenomenon of religion and for the Russian Orthodox Church. But, this interest is often cultural in nature, and among the young it is something of a fad. Even so, at the very least it indicates an attitude which is anything but militant towards religion among the Soviet people

— and that says little for the effectiveness of a half-century's worth of atheist propaganda. A better description than religious renaissance would be "a-atheism", a disinterest in the confessional atheism of Soviet ideology.

The Communist Party's criticism of atheist propaganda in practice not only indicates the occasional gap between theory and execution, it also shows undiminished determination to achieve the goals of the Party's long term atheist programme. One only needs consider the flood of atheist literature in recent years to realize that atheist propaganda is as alive and kicking as ever in the Soviet Union. This is no thanks to the personal unbridled commitment of professional *antireligiozniki*, ideologists, philosophers and propagandists; it is because of objective imperative requiring the preservation of this ideological segment: without it the ideology would forfeit integrity as *Weltanschauung*.

6. The literature of atheism

Since the Academy of Sciences began to deal with atheism as a scientific subject in the 1950s, and since it became a compulsory subject at school in the 1960s, much has been published in the Soviet Union on the subject of god, church and religion. This specialist literature of atheism consists of manuals and reference works, school books, a popular scientific monthly, a scientific series appearing every six months and a legion of monographs and brochures. Style differs: it may be academic, or didactic, it may smack of agitation, but the basis is apologetic — the aim is to defend disbelief.

In measuring the quality of specialist atheist literature one must begin with the epistemological status of Soviet atheism. In chapters 3 and 5, sections 5 and 2 respectively, this status

was compared to that of theology. Despite seeing itself as an objective science dealing with religion, ideological atheism is in fact a faith. It is scientific only in as far as it is a methodical reflexion on and a rational formulation of a *weltanschaulich* choice against the concept of god; similarly, theology is a scientific consideration of an existential acceptance of that same concept. At the risk of repetition, ideological atheism is inverted theology, neither in the empirical nor in the philosophical sense does this make said atheism a science of religion.

Putting Soviet atheism in this perspective makes Soviet atheist literature a no less serious subject for social scientists or scientists of religion. For many years the Western academic has paid little attention to this literature: only recently has a systematic study of Soviet atheist literature appeared, the work of James Thrower. Thrower's *Marxist-Leninist 'Scientific Atheism'* is a thorough analysis of modern Soviet atheism.²⁵ However, he sees it as a form of science of religion, albeit a bad one. From the arguments already advanced it has become clear that Soviet atheism cannot be so designated. To call Soviet atheism a science of religion ignores its ideological conditioning, which is not the same as political support by the state for atheism. On the latter, the preface to Thrower's book states quite correctly that political support is no argument against the scientific status of the particular variety of atheism. But ideological conditioning goes beyond political support. In other words, the Soviet governments support for atheism expresses itself as an ideological *magisterium* – giving guidelines for the study of religion. A science based on an external authority is no science, and indeed, Thrower puts the scientific status of Soviet atheism in this perspective both by criticism of its manner of argument and generalization and, strikingly, by surrounding the term 'scientific atheism' in inverted commas throughout his book.

Thrower's standard work makes it unnecessary to analyse modern Soviet specialist atheist literature here. The remarks

on the quality of that literature which follow are confined to evaluation of the form in which the doctrine is presented – to a characteristic of what can be called the intellectual flavour of the whole. At the outset one has to acknowledge that in the seventy years of its existence Soviet atheism has evolved from vulgar abuse of religion to a specialized study of the phenomenon. In itself the upgrading of atheist propaganda to academic discipline is already a sign of taking the problems of religion seriously and an implicit abandonment of Marxist optimism on its withering away.

A second development concerns the broader approach to religion. For many years Soviet atheism confined its attack to the historical explanation of religion – description of its origins its political development and decline. There was also parallel description of the rise, oppression and final victory of atheism in its historical completion as Marxist–Leninist atheism. This is still the fixed pattern for atheist textbooks. And yet differing accents are possible within this fixed historical-materialistic interpretational framework. These have led to an important broadening of themes in atheist propaganda: the cultural-anthropological theme (functions of rites), the existential theme (the so-called questions of life) and the aesthetic theme (the significance of religious art).

Remarkable in current atheist studies is the use of sociological study methods to measure the degree of religiousness per area and the effect of atheist propaganda. As with other sociological studies in the Soviet Union, these studies are conducted locally and do not provide a nationwide overview of religion's role in society. Even so, these empirical data have encouraged caution in predictions of the end of religion in a communist society. This is not stated in so many words but in complaints about the stubborn survival of religious traditions in given areas, in referring to lack of interest in atheist instruction and – above all – in encouragement of more effective anti-religious propaganda,

an invariable conclusion in every sociological study.

The shift in themes and methods in modern atheist literature in no way indicates a change in the form of Soviet atheism. As previously stated, "scientific atheism" sees no breach in principles with pre-war militant atheism. Constant reference is made to the classics of that period; and even more eloquent is the continued use of the same old arguments and methods. In particular this involves rationalistic bible criticism and physics based arguments against god. Soviet atheists and Christian fundamentalists have that much in common that the former use biblical inconsistencies to prove scripture scientifically null and void and the latter cite the same source to refute the theory of evolution.

Most remarkable remain the natural-scientific arguments against belief in god. During the militant period holy water was put under the microscope to show that it was no different to and contained the same bacteria as common-or-garden H₂O. The corpses of saints were exhumed to demonstrate that they too were subject to corruption. Scientific tests and tricks were used to recreate miracles. The efficacy of artificial fertilizer was solemnly demonstrated to be greater than that of a priestly blessing in ensuring a good harvest. The crowning empirical proof from the current period of scientific atheism must surely be the failure of Soviet astronauts to encounter god in space. Albeit that far from all members of the Soviet community of scientific atheists are equally comfortable with this school of pseudo argumentation, their specialist literature has yet to refute Yuri Gagarin's findings. Indeed, frequent variations on this cosmological proof of the non-existence of god are in current use.

The medico-scientific arguments against religion also continue in use. There is, for example, a study which gives statistics, drawn from two parishes between 1969 and 1973, proving that child baptism is harmful to physical and psychological development: baptised children are shown to be 2.8 times more liable to acute bronchial complaints, 5.7 times more liable to serious gastric

upsets, 9.5 times more liable to catch pneumonia and 2.3 times more liable to illness in general. The psychological drawback came from the involuntary nature of baptism. The author of the study, a doctor, was convinced of his case and strongly disagreed with fellow practitioners who believed the necessity of studying the consequences of baptism to have been overtaken by improved standards of hygiene. For this very reason he himself had conducted his research in an hygienic environment. The article ended with a plea for “reinforced scientific – in particular medical – atheist propaganda”.²⁶

Despite such scientifically dubious oeuvres, as previously noted, the standards of atheist literature have noticeably improved. In the first place this improvement is seen in Soviet atheist reference works – *The Atheist Dictionary* (1983), and *The Handbook of the Atheist* (1981).²⁷ The first of these has also appeared in abridged form as *The Pocket Dictionary of Atheism*.²⁸ These books contain a treasure trove of factual information on world religions, sects, theological trends, religious thinkers, confessional politics and religious culture. Naturally, presentation of the facts occurs within an ideological framework, but the importance of such works goes beyond the solid basis they provide for atheist propaganda: in a society where any and all “positive” religious literature is forbidden, they offer a loophole to those with an interest in religious matters. Generally speaking, the Soviet citizen has become skilled in reading between and behind the lines of official literature on such undesirable phenomena as religion and non-Marxist philosophy. Given the universal apathy, even revulsion, of the Soviet intelligentsia towards ideological party literature, the relative interest in books criticizing non-communist philosophies can only be explained if these are indeed read for a purpose opposite to that intended. And so, the university handbook for lectures on atheism, *History and Theory of Atheism* often remains on the owner’s bookshelf after graduation, unlike *The Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism*. As a matter of fact,

the handbook, which first appeared in 1974, is also an example of the less cramped school of atheist propaganda.²⁹

The collected articles published twice yearly since 1966 under the title *Questions of Scientific Atheism* are also notable for their more businesslike tone. The same is true to an even greater extent in the Academy of Science's *The Religions of the World*, a series of yearbooks launched in 1982.³⁰ The introduction to the first volume emphasized the complexity of religion as phenomenon and its "efforts for renewal and adjustment to modern science". And this is the main editorial target, to be fought with "well argued scientific criticism". As for the history of religion, the editors have this to say: "its objective study is incompatible with either glossing over or over emphasizing its darker side — or with an impassioned, one-sided elucidation of given episodes and personages." But, despite fine words about contributions to the science of religion (*religiovedenie*) and authors as religious scientists (*specialisty-religiovedy*), the end goal is stated as "the atheist education of the masses of the people". In other words, *specialisty-religiovedy* pass on theoretical knowledge to the more practically oriented *specialisty-antireligiozniki*.

Another example of the altered tone of modern Soviet atheism is the Soviet *Philosophic Encyclopedia* published in 1970. Definitions of terms like theology, theodicee, salvation, lot, death, eschatology and incarnation omit the usual historical and sociological irrelevancies on alienation and manipulation. Such remarks remain only by general concepts such as religion and belief. P. Ehlen makes mention of this change: "In the Philosophical Encyclopedia we find for the first time in an official publication a serious attempt to plumb christianity's own understanding of itself".³¹

Despite the change of tone in specialist Soviet atheist literature Soviet atheism admits no serious differences of opinion, no scepticism vis-a-vis the monocausal explanatory theory of historical materialism. Each and every book repeats the old truths and

is a variation on the same theme, a re-establishment of principles.

If there are no clashes within the circle of scientific atheists then there is even less likelihood of discussion with theologians or agnostics. Not even "bourgeois" atheists are invited to symposia or guest lectures. The avoidance of confrontation with those who think differently, the fear of direct challenge, must surely indicate an unvoiced realization that the doctrine is not up to it; this is an implicit recognition of the weakness of ideological atheism. If it were possible to prove itself in open debate, on an equal intellectual footing, with opponents or representatives of other and differing schools of atheism, this could only make atheist propaganda more inspiring. But that would mean a shift of intention from propaganda to study, opening of the way to philosophic pluralism. And so atheist propaganda remains at a level of which the priest Dimitri Dudko said: "If we had not met atheism as it appears in this country perhaps we might have hesitated for a long time before becoming believers. Just look at what was written against God before the revolution! If atheism had continued in the pre-revolutionary way we might never have believed again. But now we have experienced atheism in all its glory, we are drawn strongly to God." Not one single professional atheist scientist in the Soviet Union would refute another of his statements, that "it is striking that nearly everyone knows that every bookshop has something on atheism, but nobody is interested in those books. But just imagine the opposite, imagine that there was suddenly a shop where you could get the gospel, the bible and all manner of religious books. There would be such a queue outside that there would never be enough books, however many they printed."³² Father Dudko was banned from preaching in 1974 for attempting a dialogue with atheism.

More Soviet anti-religious literature is published than ever before and demand is in direct desproportion to production. That, however, is not the only paradox of the current situation of atheism in the Soviet Union: the people's interest in and

cultural thirst for things religious is greater by far than it would have been without the propaganda overkill the government uses to combat religion. And, given the dearth of alternative sources, this has led to a degree of interest in the better anti-religious literature, not for what it preaches — but for that which it preaches against.

7. Atheism and the *perestrojka* of Soviet society

Under Party leader Mikhail Gorbachev the Soviet Union has taken a turn toward enlightenment, that much is unmistakable. Soviet society is becoming more open and more tolerant, self-critical and culturally pluriform. Despite these changes for the better Soviet attitudes have, as yet, remained remarkably constant towards religion. This is not to say that positive developments can be ruled out in the future. But, for the present, we must work on the basis of measures taken and statements made by the new leadership during its first two years. The conclusion is ambivalent, not so much because of the few changes in religious legislation but because of the Soviet government's dual approach to religion. On the one hand there is political legislation and administrative regulation and on the other the ideological attitude in the media and schools. If the former are relaxed, the level of ideological anti-religious propaganda can be maintained or even heightened.

The increasingly lively Soviet press under Gorbachev has not lessened its emphasis on the need for atheist propaganda and struggle against "religious phenomena". Atheist propaganda is criticised for ineffectiveness, not that this is new, such criticism is as old as its object and has become a permanent feature of the whole. Appeals and complaints are now couched in the style

of the times and there is a new, more businesslike, terminology. Expressions like “restructuring”, “acceleration”, “new approach” and “mobilising the human factor” have become the currency of atheist literature. It seems clear that, in line with the general *perestrojka* in Soviet society, anti-religious propaganda is to be up-dated and streamlined. A *Pravda* article on 13th September 1985 made a lengthy call for just such an approach. The results of the struggle against “religious ideology” were directly linked to accelerated socio-economic development. Inertia and apathy towards atheism were to be overcome. The so-called spontaneous or natural atheists among the a-religious population were to jettison their indifferentism in the field of *Weltanschauung* and become active propagandists. The modernized atheist propaganda would have to take account of new realities: higher intellectual level of believers, increased cultural appreciation for religion and the tendency to see religion as compatible with and serving the socialist/patriotic cause. The article sees the necessity and relevance of more effective atheist propaganda as increasingly urgent with the approach of the thousandth anniversary of Russia’s conversion to christianity in 1888: “offensive counter-propaganda” by atheists is needed against “militant clerical” elements abroad using the jubilee as an anti-Soviet weapon. *Pravda* gave more detailed guidelines for this campaign: on the one hand realistic advice on the exploitation of increased demand for things spiritual – and on the other a nonsensical linking of the achievement of party economic goals and new-look, streamlined atheist propaganda. Even so, the economic link is interesting in that it relates to the politics of Mikhail Gorbachev – as such, the article can be seen as thumbnail policy sketch of atheist propaganda under the new party leader.³³

Confirmation comes from other developments in the field. At a congress for social scientists held in Moscow in September 1986, Yegor Ligachev, number two in the Soviet leadership, used businesslike language to tell Soviet educators and sociologists

their role in atheist education, in particular as regards young people in higher education. On 28th September (a Sunday) *Pravda* followed up the congress by devoting its main article to atheist education, calling once more for an offensive approach and special attention of those aesthetic and ethical aspects of religion so attractive to the young. The article also criticised "flirtation with god" (denoted by the derogatory "little god", *boženka*), in particular by writers, which "revived the old god-seeking ideas".³⁴

In recent years this has become an oft repeated warning. And not only in specialist atheist literature but also, more interestingly, in the national press. The tendency of modern Russian writers, particularly the popular 'village' school to attribute Soviet society's moral slide to the loss of religious values – albeit not in so many words – is marked by official reprimands and individual attacks by ideological conservatives. So, on 7th February 1987, *Pravda* led with an article on "restructuring and renewing of Soviet morals", continuing that solutions should not be sought in "talk of religious morality".³⁵ Such warnings are signs of a more than mere incidental disturbance as witnessed by Feliks Kuznetsov's impassioned defence of Astafyev, Aytmatov and Bykov at the plenary board meeting of the writer's union in late April 1987. The meeting dealt with the evolvment of *glasnost'* in the year following the innovative 1986 writer's congress. Some, like the editors of *Komsomol'skaja Pravda* had already expressed concern that "it is an actual fact that current literature shows a tendency towards god-building, restoration of biblical morality and admiration for religion in our history". The article named the three writers listed above, accusing them of "faults in the area of *Weltanschauung*", involving "god-seeking, god-building and flirting with god". However, Kuznetsov calls suchlike accusations "a more than clear expression of dogmatism and vulgarization in the approach to literature", in that the writers named "are not seeking god but conscience, virtue and honour".³⁶ A week

later *Literaturnaja Gazeta* sprang once more in the breach for these "our greatest writers", defending them against "dogmatic accusations of deviation from atheism".³⁷ The weekly quoted approvingly from an article entitled "The new godseeking and the old dogmas" by A. Nuykin in the May edition of *Novyj Mir*. Nuykin defended atheism with confidence but rejected the old dogmatic approach.

Party leader Gorbachev has himself referred to the need for atheist propaganda and the struggle against religion on various occasions. At the 27th Party Congress in February 1986 he was brief but to the point on the reactivation of propaganda: "Stagnation is simply unacceptable in the entire sphere of ideological, political, moral and atheist education". He went on to warn against painting "the religious remnants from the past in idyllic colours". Clearly he had a linkage of religion and nationalism in mind. During a visit to Uzbekistan in November 1986 he called for "energetic and uncompromising combating of religious phenomena".³⁸ Party and government repeated this appeal in the aftermath of nationalist unrest in Kazakhstan the following month.

The Communist Party's new programme adopted under Gorbachev devotes a single paragraph to atheism; it is both shorter and more succinct than in the preceding programme. The expression "atheist education" replaces "atheist propaganda". This up-dated terminology is in line with an earlier terminological adjustment dating from 1977 when "atheist propaganda" ousted "anti-religious propaganda". "Education" is not only more businesslike than "propaganda", it also goes further: it points to an obvious integration of atheism in the educational process and is thus more directly connected to the personal life of the (young) Soviet citizen. This is also clear from the fact that the party programme mentions a new element in atheist education, namely "spreading wide the new Soviet traditions and customs". This refers to the Soviet civil equivalents for church weddings and

baptism, "socialist rites" – as the jargon calls them – deserving ever wider employment in the educational process aimed at patriotism and citizenship.

At the April 1987 Komsomol congress the organization's chairman, Mironenko, had this to say on the theme of religion: "It is necessary to return to the offensive in the struggle against religious *Weltanschauung*. Now more than ever it is important to overcome petit-bourgeois neutralist attitudes to religion, the snobbish and trendy following of mystique, and apathy towards atheism – the spiritual value of socialism."³⁹

Clearly, the Soviet government attitude towards religion (i.e. religious *Weltanschauung* and religious education) has not changed in principle under the dynamic leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev. The general restructuring of Soviet society seems to have boosted atheist propaganda out of the slough into which it had fallen under Brezhnev. As *Pravda* put it on 23rd January 1987: "The system of atheist propaganda lags hopelessly behind life today and requires basic restructuring."⁴⁰ The Soviet government's ongoing atheist stance is in no way out of line with the many changes in other areas of Soviet society. Atheist propaganda was a political imperative for survival of the ideological Soviet state; and the greater the degree of economic and cultural liberalization, the greater seems the imperative. Here is the paradox of the Gorbachev reforms: increased freedoms in economic and cultural spheres have a political price in the form of a reinforced ideological line elsewhere. The object is to avoid a stampede which might topple the edifice of state.

Hence, churches in the Soviet Union have no media access and when dealing with church and religion, the media sticks to its traditional rejection of religion – even when they write positively about the culture of the Russian Orthodox Church. In March 1987 the chairman of the Soviet journalist's union told his profession's national congress that whatever criticism or self-criticism, the press must continue the struggle against

“nationalism, religion, pacifism and cosmopolitanism”, four traditional bourgeois sins whose propaganda is forbidden.⁴¹ The Soviet Union’s remarkable proposal at the third Helsinki follow-up conference in Vienna (March 1987) that the propaganda of atheism be included in the U.N. declaration of human rights has to be seen in the same light.⁴² The incident is noteworthy not so much because of the Soviets’ failure to suggest equal freedom for religious propaganda, but because this archetypal Soviet ideological proposal clashes with the more business-like approach to human rights under Gorbachev. Even so, it was a continuation of an earlier attempt during the 1950s to gain atheism international cachet when, as member of the UN committee pondering the definition of religious freedom, the Soviet Union made considerable efforts to have atheism categorized as a protected philosophy of life – enjoying equal status with religious equivalents but clearly separate from agnosticism which the Soviet delegation explicitly wanted to deny similar protection.⁴³

In the Soviet Union atheist propaganda is taken seriously to such a degree that its opposite – theist propaganda, i.e. public religious education – is actually illegal. Such has been the situation since 1929, a situation confirmed by a new law in 1986. The law on private work, effective as from May 1987, permitted private tuition with the exception of subjects not found in official curricula – hence also religious instruction and theology.

As already mentioned, church and believers are denied media access on principle. However, in 1987 an exception was made, albeit an irrelevancy: in March 1987 *Golos Rodiny*, (The Voice of the Fatherland), a magazine for Russians domiciled abroad interviewed metropolitan Sergi of Odessa on the millennium of Russian Orthodoxy.⁴⁴ The article deals with the significance of the church’s role in Russian history and in the creation of Russian culture and mentions the national church council to be held in June 1988. The irrelevance to *glasnost*’ lies in the

fact that it is written for Russians abroad and in the shrill contrast with the avalanche of anti-millennium literature inside the Soviet Union. The same applies to the Moscow Patriarchate's new (January 1987) multi-lingual monthly information bulletin, *Moskovskij Cerkovnyi Vestnik* (Moscow Church Messenger). Russian, English, German, French, Spanish and Arabic editions provide information on the Orthodox, Islamic, Jewish and Protestant communities in the Soviet Union. Content and style are that of a tourist hand-out. The magazine's colour photos are quite magnificent.

Whether or not the salutary openness, currently soothing away the suffocating censorship, will eventually be applied to the reporting of church and religious affairs does not – in light of the foregoing – appear imminent. But there is the very tiniest glimmer of hope. On 4th February 1987 *Literaturnaja Gazeta* carried an interview with Cardinal Glemp of Poland. More in teresting and important than content – platitudes on the struggle for peace – were the journalist's introductory remarks. The actual significance of the Catholic church in Poland was dealt with in a neutral, objective fashion, quite free of the usual pejorative vocabulary. In the Soviet context, such a businesslike approach is new.⁴⁵

Among details which the good will of the observer may label as positive is the ideological novelty of printing the word "god" upper case "G". God with a capital "G" appeared in Chingiz Aytmatov's story *Placha* (The Scaffold), in the June 1986 edition of *Novyj Mir*: a thing of little consequence for a Western atheist, but a major step in the Soviet context where typographic or orthographic atheism was a matter of principle.

So much for recent developments in Soviet atheist propaganda. The other aspect of Soviet religious policy – legislation covering the churches – is the scene of a more important process of change. Gorbachev's aim of giving Soviet society more certainty under the law has brought about less arbitrary application against the

churches. A change in the law announced in January 1986 was designed to broaden the legal base of the churches and the conditions of employment for clergy. The churches, or "religious associations" in Soviet legalese, have become legal entities and are now in a position to own their own premises (previously these had been rented from the state). Children of ten and over are now allowed to take part in services and sing in choirs. The clergy ("servants of the cults") may "perform rites" outside their parishes and, in exceptional cases, in private houses. These changes in the law have yet to appear in any official publication. The only announcement has been in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* and then in somewhat obscure formulation.⁴⁶ As with so many laws in the Soviet Union, all rests on actual interpretation by civil servants; but if, as Gorbachev wants, the Soviet government is to abide by the letter of its laws, and to publish them so that all citizens and/or believers know where they are — then this is a positive development.

Permission for the Russian Orthodox Church to hold a national council in its thousandth year represents another positive development. In his announcement, Metropolitan Sergi of Odessa, linked the council with a new church statute (replacing that dating from 1945 and unfavourably amended under Khrushchev).⁴⁷

Yet another shaft of light is provided by permission for churches in the Soviet Union to print one hundred thousand bibles.⁴⁸ Whilst this will no where near meet religious and cultural demands and these bibles will not go on public sale, the figure is far greater than any previous edition printed mainly for use in atheist propaganda. But, the Soviet government's absolute control in this matter only serves to highlight the anomaly of an atheist political executive laying down just how many religious books may be printed. Indeed, the very existence of legislation on religion accords ill with the tenets of a secularized state. Removal of this anomaly would go some way to making the Soviet Union a modern state: however, such a step seems unlikely, even under Gorbachev.

A judgement on Gorbachev's religious policy is premature. Although until now Soviet laws on church activities have not been changed fundamentally, there is the general feeling that real reforms are to come. The growing intellectual and cultural freedom in contemporary Soviet society, will surely result in greater religious freedom. The thousandth anniversary of Russian Orthodoxy may prove to be a turning point, despite the efforts of atheist propaganda.

8. Atheism and the millennium of christianity in Russia

Atheistic literature has always been plentiful in the Soviet Union. Since 1982 however, in addition to the "normal" atheistic literature there has been an extra stream of books and articles provoked by the millennium of the Russian Orthodox Church. This anti-Orthodox literature cannot be considered to be intended as a balance for the propaganda of the Russian Orthodox Church, because this does not exist, or at least not within the Soviet Union. The only book that the patriarchate of Moscow, up to now, has issued in connection with the millennium is a book written in German, printed in Switzerland and translated into English and French. We shall return to this later. Nevertheless, Soviet books frequently refer to the propaganda of the Russian Orthodox Church. Reference is made in fact to the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, but this is not available to the Soviet citizen.

The second reason that is often given is that propaganda from abroad seizes on the millennium in order to give the "religious ideology" in the Soviet Union an extra boost. The material appearing in the West, however, is intended for the Western public and, once again, this cannot be obtained by interested Soviet readers, let alone the public at large.

The only remaining explanation of the extra injection of atheistic literature in the Soviet Union must be: to offer a balance to the spontaneous interest of the Russian people for their own church and church history. But atheist propaganda cannot admit openly that this spontaneous interest exists and is so strong, after seventy years of atheist propaganda monopoly in press and education. Propaganda should have to admit its own failure not so much in the field of methodology but in the understanding of the religious phenomenon as such. Atheist propaganda therefore refers to foreign factors and to the alleged ideological activities of the church in the Soviet Union itself.

The anti-Orthodox literature which has appeared in recent years in connection with the millennium of the Russian Church, can be divided into three categories: a) historiographical works, b) atheistic art criticism and c) publications of the Russian religious critics of the 19th century. We shall now give a review of that literature from the period 1982-1988, that is to say from the year that the first book with a reference to the millennium appeared, up to the works announced for the year 1988 in the weekly catalogue *Novye Knigi*, before May 1987. We shall restrict ourselves to books, and therefore not mention articles appearing in the monthly *Nauka i Religija* (Science and Religion), in the annual collection *Argumenty* (Arguments), and in the magazine *Argumenty i fakty* (Arguments and Facts). The latter two periodicals started accusing the West in 1982 of "making political abuse of the thousandth anniversary". There are moreover the scientific publications *Voprosy Naučnogo Ateizma* (Questions of Scientific Atheism) and *Voprosy Filosofii* (Philosophical Questions). These latter magazines treat the theme of the christianization of Russia several times, but in a more businesslike manner, in contrast to the more bantering style of the three periodicals first mentioned. A summary is given below of the anti-Orthodox books which have been published or are about to be published in the Soviet Union in the period that the Russian Church has

been preparing to celebrate her millennium. The contents, as well as sceptically intended quotation marks, have been taken from the book or catalogue, unless otherwise indicated.

a. Historiographical works

E.S. Baričev, *Pravoslavnaja Cerkov': istorija i social 'naja suščnost'* (The Orthodox Church: history and social nature), 1982.

In the Foreword mention is made of the distortions, exaggerations, and downright falsifications of the role of the Orthodox Church in Russian history, due to the publications of the Moscow Patriarchate in connection with "the great jubilee" and "the historical occasion" of 1988.

N.N., *"Kreščenie Rusi" Glazami Russkich Istorikov* ("The Baptism of Rus" in the Eyes of Russian Historians), 1984.

Noted again in 1986 with the title: *Sobytiya. Mify. Istoriki* (Events. Myths. History).

Texts by progressive 18th and 19th century Russian historians and by Soviet researchers, e.g. Karamzin, Klyuchevski, Pokrovski, and Nikolski, who refute the positive role of the Orthodox Church in Russian history and point out that the actual role of the church was reactionary.

N.S. Gordienko, *"Kreščenie Rusi": fakty protiv legend i mifov. Polemičeskie zametki* ("The Baptism of Rus": facts against legends and myths. Polemical notes), 1984.

The author sets the scholarly facts concerning the christianization of old Russia against the theological legends and clerical myths, which distort reasons, the nature, and the consequences of this process. The book is written as a reaction against clerical propaganda which is active in connection with the approaching thousandth anniversary of the establishment of christianity as the state religion in Russia.

G.G. Prošin, *Černoe Voinstvo: Russkij pravoslavnyj monastyr'. Legenda i byl'* (The Black Army: the Russian Orthodox Monastery. Legend and Reality), 1985. 2nd impr. announced for 1988.

As opposed to the legends in Russian Orthodoxy concerning the monasteries as propagators of culture and moral values, the author shows the true social and ideological role of the monasteries. The book contains reasoned criticism of the ideals and the way of life of those living in a monastery and reveals the anti-humanitarian nature of monasticism.

N.S. Semenkin, *Filosofija Bogo-iskatel'stva: kritika religiozno-filosofskich idej sofiologov* (The Philosophy of the Godsearching: a criticism of the religious-philosophical ideas of the sophiologists), 1986.

Opposed to the ideas of Russian religious philosophers at the beginning of this century, which are now spread by the Russian church and presented as proof of the cultural contribution of the church to the national heritage.

N.S. Gordienko, *Sovremennoe Russkoe Pravoslavie* (Modern Russian Orthodoxy), 1987.

A critical description of the ideology and practices of the Russian church on the eve of her thousandth anniversary. The book shows the untenability of the attempts of theologians to present Russian Orthodoxy as a positive factor in social progress, as the protectress of cultural traditions and as the champion of good morals.

G.M. Filist, *Vvedenie Christianstva na Rusi: istorija i vymysly* (The Introduction of Christendom to Rus: history and make-believe), 1987.

Concerned with the socio-economic and political premisses for the introduction of a new religion, the process of the christianization of nations and the role of Orthodoxy in the further development of production forces and culture in Russia.

N.I. Tolstoj, otv. red., *Vvedenie Christianstva u Narodov Central'noj i Vostočnoj Evropy. Kreščenie Rusi: sbornik tezisov* (The Introduction of Christianity to the Peoples of Central and Eastern Europe. The Baptism of Rus: a collection of theses), 1987.

Summary of 28 contributions to a scholarly conference on the historical meaning of the introduction of christianity in Slavic areas. Archeological, linguistic, and cultural-historical considerations.

A.D. Suchov, ed., *Vvedenie Christianstva na Rusi* (The Introduction of Christianity in Rus), 1987.

The authors, Soviet philosophers, historians, and linguists, present the authentic nature of events and the real causes against the theological falsifications of the history of the christianization of Russia. Aimed at non-Marxist and more particularly the clerical writing of history.

A.N. Nefedov, *Na Drevnem Makovce* (On the Old Makovets Hill), 1987.

About the Troitse-Sergi monastery, situated on the Makovets Hill in Zagorsk. An explanation of its cultural importance but also a criticism of the idealised views on the role of the monastery in history and a refutation of the bourgeois-clerical fabrications such as the despising of Russian culture by the Soviet government.

I.I. Migovič, *Klerikal'nyj Nacionalizm na Službe Antisovetizma: na primere uniatsko-nacionalističeskogo al'jansa* (Clerical Nationalism in the Service of Anti-Sovietism: the example of the alliance between Uniates and nationalists), 1987.

About the Ukrainian church abroad which, assisted by the Vatican and Western intelligence services, incites the Ukrainian population against the Soviet Union by means of radio programmes and underground activities.

Ju. Kalinin, *Modernizm Russkogo Pravoslavlja* (The Modernism of Russian Orthodoxy), 1987.

Concerned with new tendencies in the ideology and the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church in connection with her thousandth anniversary.

S. Savel'ev, *Idejnoe Bankrotstvo Bogoiskatel'stva v Rossii Načala XXv* (The Ideological Bankruptcy of the Godsearching in Russia at the beginning of the Twentieth Century), 1987.

About the Petersburg group "New Religious Consciousness" which preached a new "religious revolution".

N.N., *Christianstvo i Rus'* (Christianity and Rus'), 1987.

A collection of articles about the Christianization of Kiev-Rus, the church at the time of the Tartar oppression, the rise and dissolution of the patriarchate, the support of the church for dictatorship and bondage, and the church after the October Revolution.

K. Dmitruk, *Uniatskie Krestonostsy Včera i Segodnja* (The Uniated Crusaders Yesterday and Today), 1988. Publication announced.

About the Union of Brest. The author shows that the nature of this was against the people and the Ukrainian nation. That is also the case with the anti-Soviet activities of the uniate church abroad at present, which has joined the "crusade" of imperialism against the USSR.

A. Klibanov, sost., *Russkoe Pravoslavie: vechi istorii* (Russian Orthodoxy: landmarks of her history), 1988. Publication announced.

A collection on the position of the Russian Orthodox church in the cultural-historical development of Russia. The authors show the untenability of the attempts of theologians to idealise the past of the Russian Orthodox Church, to colour this past and to present the Russian Orthodox Church as the only preserver of historic traditions.

A. Kuz'min, red., *Kreščenie Rusi v Trudach Russkich in Sovetskikh Učennykh* (The Baptism of Rus in the Works

of Russian and Soviet Scholars), 1988. Publication announced.

A scholarly critical analysis of the christianization of the old Rus, of the socio-economic and spiritual situation before the introduction of christianity and of the struggle of christianity with the heathen and heretical movements.

A. Borodin, *Christianstvo na Rusi* (Christianity in Rus), 1988. Publication announced.

An historical-scholarly criticism of the concepts of church-historians and theologians concerning the role of christianity in the formation of the Russian perception of the State, the organisation of resistance against foreign invaders, the development of morals and the spread of culture and education.

N.N., *Vvedenie Christianstva Pravjaščej Verchuškoj Kievskoj Rusi i ego Posledstvija* (The Introduction of Christianity by the Governing Upper Class of Kiev Rus and its Consequences), 1988. Announced.

About the origins of the organised Orthodox Church in the Eastern Slavic regions and the consequences of the so-called baptism of Rus for the State and the Old Russian people.

M. Kopanica, *Sovremennye Social'nye Konceptii Russkogo Pravoslavlja* (Modern Social Concepts of Russian Orthodoxy), 1988. Announced.

Criticism of modern developments in Russian Orthodoxy as "the theology of the revolution", "the theology of peace" and "Christian patriotism". Exposure of the struggle of the ideologists of the Orthodox Church for the renewal of the old, reactionary ideas and towards the merging of modernism and traditionalism.

From the short description of the contents of the books, the tendency they share will become apparent. Frequently used in the arguments are words like falsifications (*fal'sifikatsii*), distortions (*izvraščeniya*), fabrications (*izmysleniya*), inventions (*vymysli*), myths (*mify*), deceitful representation (*ložnoje predstavlenie*) and pretentions (*pritjazaniya*), usually with the

adjective "clerical", "bourgeois-clerical", "ecclesiastical" or "theological". That is a clear setting that leaves no room for doubts. Soviet anti-Orthodox literature is not a factual writing of history, nor is it a hypothetical analysis or neutral scholarship. This is just as true of the ecclesiastical historiography and the theological view of history that they dispute. Both desire to present a message for which they simplify the complex history and idealise it. But ecclesiastical historiography has no chance in the Soviet Union. Against whom then, are all these Soviet ideological attacks actually aimed?

This brings us to a strange aspect of the Soviet anti-millennium literature and of atheistic propaganda in general. It is fighting against a church which exists and continues to expand without explicit propaganda, against a philosophy of life that is presented as outmoded but which continues to exert magnetism. One has to fight against ideas which, although they have not been committed to paper in Soviet society for seventy years, are experienced by many in that society as obvious truths, and remain indivisibly bound to the spiritual tradition of their own culture. Theologically one may speak of the insurmountable strength of belief, from a scholarly point of view one can only wonder at the vitality of religion and recognize it.

The bent toward the religious and the interest in theological-philosophical thought is indicated in Soviet literature by the unique Russian expression "god-searching" or "god-seeking" (*bogoiskatel'stvo*). These term came into existence in the first years of this century in Russia as an expression of religious renewal among the Russian intelligentsia. The Communist authors saw even then themselves forced to take action against this tendency. In 1909 Georgi Plechanov, the father of Russian Marxism, wrote a long article *Concerning the so-called Religious Search in Russia*, in which he says: "At present there is a strong demand here for 'religion' for many social reasons That may be explained by the great events that Russia has experienced in recent years. Under

the influence of these events the belief of many, many 'intellectuals' in a speedy victory of a more or less progressive society has disappeared." This article was re-published in 1977 in a collection of atheistic writings of Plechanov, and the editor again mentions in the introduction the "considerable growth during recent years of the interest in religion, in ecclesiastical art and in the cultural role of the church."⁴⁹ Against this "one-sided interest" is set Plechanov's criticism of the God-searching and the religious interest in his time, thus unintentionally admitting that little has changed in this respect in seventy years.

b. Works of art criticism

The aforementioned works on the role of the Orthodox Church in Russian history deal with the "alleged" cultural impact of the Russian church. In addition to this, however, specific works have been written on religious art in Russia. These provide extensive atheistic art criticism, an interpretation and appreciation of Russian religious art with the explicit rejection of any original religious meaning. This atheistic art criticism originated in the Soviet Union by a reaction to the rediscovery by the people, and in particular by the Russian intelligentsia, of Russian Orthodox art, which had been neglected and ignored for years. In a book published by D.M. Ugrinovich in 1982 *Iskusstvo i Religija* (Art and Religion) the increasing interest in Old Russian art during the last ten to fifteen years is valued positively. At the same time art historians, critics, museum staff, and excursion leaders are summoned to show in a clearly Marxist manner the inconsistencies and the social function of religious art and to accentuate the role of free thought and atheism in art. The Soviet artists themselves, writers, dramatists, stage-directors, film producers, and painters, are accused of taking very few atheist themes and, worse still, of allowing themselves to be carried away by church

terminology, attributes, symbols, and biblical subjects. This ideological reaction to Russian church art is strengthened in connection with the Orthodox millennium, at least until mid-1987. A.N. Ipatov, *Pravoslavie i Russkaja Kul'tura* (Orthodoxy and Russian Culture), 1985.

The author shows the real aims envisaged when the church extended writing, architecture, painting and music in Russia. In addition it is shown how the church was perpetually subject to the influences of Russian peasant culture, traditional religious experiences, and ethical representations.

Ja. I. Šurygin/V.I. Kondrat'ev, *Ogon' i Tlen: očerki ob iskusstve i religii* (Fire and Decay: essays on art and religion), 1985.

The writers expose the clerical myths concerning the decisive role of Orthodoxy in the shaping of esthetic norms and values.

B.M. Mar'janov, *Krušenie Legendy: protiv klerikal'nych fal'sifikacij tvorčestva A.S. Puškina* (The Shattering of a legend: against the clerical falsifications of the work of A.S. Pushkin), 1985.

Concerned with the real relationship of the poet Pushkin to religion and the Church. Shows in particular how the reconciliation of Pushkin with the Church on his deathbed was organised by the Church and the Czar, that his religious poems have been misinterpreted and that Pushkin was always an atheist.

Ju. N. Gerasimov/V.I. Rabinovič, *Zodčestvo i Pravoslavie* (Architecture and Orthodoxy), 1986.

Does the artistic beauty of cult buildings give testimony to religion? Does the beauty of the buildings not arise from non-religious sources? This book answers these questions by revealing the deep conflict of interests between the church and art.

V.A. Zoc, *Pravoslavie i Kul'tura: fakty protiv domyslov* (Orthodoxy and Culture: facts against assumptions), 1986.

The author uses a great deal of factual material to show the groundlessness of the theological claims to an important role of

the Orthodox church in the development of the spiritual culture of the Russian, White Russian and Ukrainian peoples.

One important thought in Soviet atheistic art-criticism is that the Russian Orthodox Church has wrongly considered herself to be the source and protectress of Russian culture. Christian art reveals nothing of the Christian nature of the Russian people. Soviet authors state that the Russians have always been free-thinkers at heart and distrustful of the clergy. Ecclesiastical art appeared to be art in spite of the church and would often have emerged against the wishes of the church leaders. The art of icon-painting was able to blossom because the painters contravened the rules of the church with regard to this art-form. Religious art must be valued as an achievement of the people, as an expression of its creative spirit, which expressed itself in a religious form because Christianity was the state religion. It was only the abolition of Christianity as a compulsory religion that brought the Russian artist true artistic freedom, and seventy years of Soviet art expressed the true nature of the Russian people better than a thousand years of Orthodox esthetics was capable of doing.

A second central theme of atheistic art analysis is that the beauty of religious art does not comment on the value of religion as a philosophy of life. The authors of the books mentioned warn against the misleading conclusion that religious art is the expression of real human feelings and desires, or that, if religion leads to such high artistic expression, it must be of a deep significance. Against this it is stated that religion has merely concealed its true nature as spiritual oppressor in its esthetic expression. The Orthodox Church is also accused of tempting young people to religion by means of the esthetic effect of her liturgy.

In general the anti-Orthodox books from the section on atheistic art criticism are scarcely scholarly. By means of a grim ideological interpretation and in a trivializing tone Russian art is de-Christianized in retrospect. In contrast to Soviet atheistic

studies on Christian theology, which are clearly of a more rational nature due to the abstract subject matter, the criticism of religious art is charged with emotion. It seems as though the authors are unhappy that such magnificent art has been devoted to religious themes. The form is admired but the content is rejected. They know that ecclesiastical art and esthetics exert a strongly evocative influence on the Russian people and offer a welcome means of escape from the ideological dullness and lack of spirituality of Soviet existence, and that is an extra reason for Soviet atheistic authors to immunise the population through their works against esthetic-religious influences. True scholarly art criticism is to be found in the Soviet Union in studies that have not been written in connection with the atheist propaganda, and in that respect many recognised standard works of Soviet authors have appeared on the art of the icon and on church architecture.

c. Publication of the 19th century Russian atheists

Another form of retrospective de-Christianization of Russian culture is the extra attention paid to atheist philosophers and anti-church commentators of the nineteenth century. It is a fact that there was a strong anti-church current among the Russian cultural elite in the previous century and that the revolutionary intelligentsia was entirely atheistic from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. This fact, however, is not simply recognised in Soviet anti-Orthodox literature and explained in a businesslike manner starting from the political-reactionary standpoint of the Russian Orthodox Church, but is exploited in an expressly ideological manner. The anti-religious disposition of the Russian political publicists in the last century is quoted in the Soviet view as proof of an innate hostility to religion in the character of Russians. That is naturally just as much an idealization of the Russian soul as is the Slavic mystification con-

cerning the innate religious nature of the Russian people.

The second argument that has to be brought against the Soviet treatment of nineteenth century Russian atheists is its selective nature. The equally strongly represented religious philosophers in the history of Russian ideas – who are incredibly popular among the present Soviet intelligentsia – are ignored.

The atheistic writings of nineteenth century Russian revolutionaries and the critical or satirical stories about the Orthodox Church by classical Russian authors are not published specifically in connection with the millennium of the Russian Orthodox Church. They are constantly published, but are adapted for the anti-millennium campaign by the references made to them in introductions. The introduction or foreword to the publications make it abundantly clear that the texts are republished as a form of atheist propaganda and not for purely scientific reasons.

This form, however, in spite of the accompanying commentaries, is the most scholarly and most interesting form of atheistic propaganda. The nineteenth century texts themselves are not tampered with by Soviet editors, although the word “god” is written without an initial capital. The historical texts themselves are on the one hand an argument in favour of Soviet atheism, and on the other an unintended criticism of it. They reveal that Soviet atheism today, in addition to a Marxist source, also has its own Russian source, to which the Soviet ideologists appeal and about which they boast. But at the same time it becomes clear from nineteenth century Russian works how twentieth century Soviet atheism has been methodologically degenerated. Whereas the nineteenth century authors give spontaneous, personally motivated religious criticism, not laid on an ideological Procrustean bed and in open controversy with opponents, the Soviet ideologists now give a dogmatically petrified, historically distorted description of church history and do so from a safe, propagandistic monopoly position.

Given below are the recent Soviet publications and anthologies of Russian church critics.

N.S. Gordienko, sost., *Russkie Pisateli o Religii i Cerkvi: izbrannaja proza* (Russian Writers on Religion and Church: selected prose), 1984.

Texts by Radishchev, Gertsen, Pomyalovski, Saltykov-Shchedrin, Melnikov, Turgenyev, Leskov, G.I. Uspenski, Chekhov, L.N. Tolstoi, Mamin-Sibiryak, Korolenko, Kuprin, L.I. Andreyev, Gorki. In an epilogue the compiler points out the topicality of the anthology in respect of the thousandth anniversary of the "Baptism of Rus", where ecclesiastical circles would like to present things as though Russia had an extraordinary religious tradition. The compiler suggests on the other hand that the atheistic relay race of classical Russian literature has been taken over by Soviet writers. A knowledge of the atheistic tradition is important in neutralising the attempts of clerical-theological circles to extend their lying fabrications.

L.A. Veličanskaja, sost., *Cel' žizni — žizn* (The Aim of Life is Life), 1984.

Texts by Belinski, Gertsen, Ogarev, Butashevich-Petrashkevski, Chernyshevski, Dobrolyubov, Pisarev, Antonovich.

The compiler refutes in her foreword the Slavophile view of Russia and the viewpoints of Russian philosophers from the "religious renaissance" at the beginning of the twentieth century. She reveals the progressive nature of Russian atheism and the methodological inconsistencies which result from its ignorance of Marxism.

D. Pisarev, *Ob Ateizme, Religii i Cerkvi* (Concerning Atheism, Religion and the Church), 1984.

A selection from the writings of the revolutionary democrat and essayist, Pisarev.

F.G. Nikitina, sost., *Petrashkevtsy ob Ateizme, Religii i Cerkvi* (Petrashkevtsy about Atheism, Religion and the Church), 1986.

Texts by members of the revolutionary company of Petrashkevtsy, utopian socialists and democrats, who opposed the mystification of human relationships.

L.P. Poljakov, sost., *Radiščev i Dekabristy: iz ateističeskogo nasledija pervych russkich revoljucionerov* (Radishchev and the Decembrists: from the atheistic legacy of the first Russian revolutionaries), 1987.

P. Lavrov, *O Religii: izbrannye ateističeskie proizvedenija* (About Religion: selected atheistic works), 1987.

Works of the prominent nineteenth century Russian revolutionary which to day retain their value for atheist education and research. Most of the material is published here for the first time.

Thus we conclude our summary of recent atheist literature in the Soviet Union. It should again be said that this only covers part of the literature, to the extent that this is connected with the publicity campaign aimed against the millennium of the Russian Orthodox Church. This summary is incomplete as soon as published, because the ideological-scholarly struggle with the Russian Orthodox Church and with religion in general continues.

d. Positive approaches to Russian religious culture

It would be incorrect to be of the opinion that the Soviet study of the relationship between the church and Russian culture is limited to the standpoint, style, and method of the anti-religious works summarised in the previous section. Those are works intended for propaganda and are not written for scholarship's sake. However, there are many competent and famous Soviet scholars who make invaluable contributions to the recording of Russian religious culture. Dmitri Likhachev, the internationally renowned literature scholar, should be mentioned in the very first instance, a member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, chairman of the recently established Soviet Cultural Fund and, apparently, a member of the Orthodox Church. In addition there are many mediaevalists, art historians and iconologists (like V.

Lazarev and M. Alpatov, who wrote standard works about Russian iconography). As a recent example of objective Soviet scholarly study on ecclesiastical art, mention might be made of A. Komech's book on church architecture in Kievan Rus.⁵⁰

A second remark should be made concerning the publication of the nineteenth century Russian philosophers. Although atheist propaganda accords an exclusive place to anti-church philosophers from Russian history, in scholarly Soviet circles there is an increasing number of claims that religious philosophers should also be published – those philosophers to whom the current god-seekers among the Soviet intellectuals are attracted. These philosophers are officially not referred to as “religious” philosophers but are called “idealist” philosophers. Awareness is growing that they are just as much a part of Russian culture as are the so-called “revolutionary democrats”, the materialist and nihilist writers of the last century to which the Soviet ideologists appeal. Pleas for the publication of the religious philosophers are made regularly, since the critical writers' congress of 1986. As, for instance in the *Literaturnaja Gazeta* on the May 13, 1987. In a discussion on cultural education a participant said: “I really cannot understand at all why it is not possible to publish the Russian idealist philosophers which were the fame of Russia in the 19th and 20th centuries – V.S. Solovyev and others. A person cannot regard himself as educated without knowing at least the names of these philosophers. Classical Russian philosophy cannot be limited to Gertsen, Chernyshevski etc. But that is exactly what we do. We tear away pieces and cut things out.”⁵¹

One of those Russian thinkers has been published meanwhile. A complete Russian edition of Chaadayev's eight philosophical letters and part of his ordinary correspondence was published for the first time.⁵² Irritation has been expressed more than once about the slow progress of a complete edition of Dostoyevski, who is actually quoted remarkably often in connection with the moral renewal in today's Soviet society.

The fact that in Soviet scholarship today a more subtle view is developing of Russian history and of the role of ecclesiastical culture is apparent from the announced complete publication of the great nineteenth century writers of history, S. Solovyev, the father of the aforementioned religious philosopher, and Klyuchevski, and from the discussions concerning the publishing of Karamzin. Although they are not published primarily because of their positive view of the Orthodox Church, this view will surely arouse more interest than the commonplace disparaging writing of history by the writers of atheist propaganda.

As a last example of the recent changes in the Soviet attitude to Russian religious culture, mention should be made of an article in *Literaturnaja Gazeta* about Cyril and Methodius, the apostles of the Slavs.⁵³ The author criticizes the ignorance of the Soviet people about these founders of the Slavic-Russian culture and pleads for a national feast-day on the May 24 as is already the case in Bulgaria. In the still unavoidably schizophrenic manner, this article minimalises the strictly religious activities of Cyril and Methodius, but the recognition of their decisive role in Russian culture is a clear rehabilitation of these saints and contrasts with the ideological approach of atheistic cultural history.

In view of these positive developments in the Soviet perception of the Russian past, it is all the more noticeable that the Orthodox church herself is not given any chance of publishing her view of Russian history and its role in creating national culture. The Russian church has not been able to publish much about her own millennium. Her scholarly production is limited to a number of articles in the monthly magazine *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, intended for internal use and for foreign subscribers, and in her yearbook *Bogoslovskie Trudy* (*Theological Works*), also not available in Soviet bookshops. The authors of the Soviet anti-millennium books quote extensively from that couple of articles, so as to show to what extent the Russian church abuses the millennium for propaganda purposes. The very first anti-

millennium book, that of Barichev in 1982, commences with this reproach to the church, but at that time no single church article had been published. The *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* had only published a speech by Patriarch Pimen, and that was sufficient for Barichev to speak of "extensive propaganda" by the Russian church.

And yet the Moscow Patriarchate has published one single book in connection with the millennium, but that was for foreign countries. It is called *Die orthodoxe Kirche in Russland* and was published in Zürich in 1982, and later in other West European countries.⁵⁴ It was compiled by Fred Mayer, a celebrated Swiss photographer, and Pitirim, Archbishop of Volokolamsk. Pitirim, now Metropolitan, is also head of the publication department of the Moscow Patriarchate and chief editor of the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. The book is primarily a book to look at and has truly magnificent large-scale colour photographs of the liturgy, life in the monasteries and the architecture of the Russian Orthodox church. In addition it has five articles on the history, architecture, icons, spirituality and the situation of the Russian Orthodox Church today.

What would have been more obvious than to publish this book in Russia as well? Maybe without the beautiful photographs which would turn the book into a best-seller and thus make the considerable anti-millennium literature sink into immediate oblivion. The articles are moreover anything but critical of the Soviet authorities. The fact that this is still not possible in Soviet Russia shows clearly the enforced scholarly isolation of the church. The fact that Metropolitan Pitirim cannot publish his book about Russian ecclesiastical culture in his own country is the more noticeable, since in November 1986 he was appointed a committee member of the recently established Soviet Cultural Fund. It is equally strange that Pitirim did not publish his personal contribution to the book, the article "Zehn Jahrhunderte Russisch-Orthodoxe Kirche" in a Russian magazine. Pitirim's

article was published, however, in 1985 in the East German church magazine *Zeichen der Zeit*.⁵⁵

The latter publication is remarkable in one certain aspect. It is not only a new translation from the Russian with small variations in sentence structure and use of words, it is also a censored version. The censor has quite systematically made stipulations about one kind of adjunct: namely that every adjectival or adverbial use which contributes a positive or typically spiritual dimension to the subsequent noun or the event described should be left out. The result is a minimalised and colourless history of the church, in which people and events, actions and affairs that the author accentuates and had given a clearly religious value, are reduced to abstractons. The relevant adjectives and adverbs are: *wichtig, gross, ganz, endgültig, tief, unzertrennlich, immens, froh, grossartig, hervorragend, deutlich, echt, eigenständig, schöpferisch, gewaltig, christlich* (in the expression "*russische christliche Kultur*"), *hoh, konkret-moralisch, unablässig, verlässlich, unsichtbar, ständig, geistlich, innerlich, weitgespannt, intensiv, heilig, klar, religiös, voll, eifrig, energisch, unschätzbar, wesentlich, allgemein, siegreich, patriottisch, berühmt, freiwillig, providentiell, segensreich, gottmenschlich, welterlösend, frei, unentgeltlich, zahlreich, trostend, hellend, heroisch, unaufhörlich, weit, vollkommen, systematisch, unbestritten, lebendig, unauslöschlich, katholisch, allumfassend, russisch* (in the expression "*russisch geistlich*"), *glänzend, wunderbar, ungeheuer, opferbereit, gemeinsam, offen, unnachgiebig, solid, herzlich, erlösend, selbstlos, äusserst, fruchtbar, mütterlich, sakral, reich*.

The omission of these qualifications fits exactly into the Soviet ideological approach to the church and to religion. Undoubtedly the role of the church in Russian history was not as "superlative" as is represented in the historical self-perception of the Russian Orthodox Church, but communist historiography has the very least right to make this kind of reproach concerning the writing of history. If, however, the *Zeichen der Zeit* (signs of the times)

in contemporary Soviet society, notably *glasnost*' and ideological self-criticism, are the forerunners of a real new thinking in the Soviet Union, than it could be expected that Soviet communist approach to christianity will lose its historiographical one-sidedness, if not, in the long run, its ideological prejudices.

Notes

1. *Ateističeskij Slovar'*, 40.
2. For a description of the re-evaluation of the "Lenin generation" in atheist literature see J. Delaney Grossman (1972).
3. G. Andreev (1967).
4. L. Filippov (1972).
5. *Ateističeskij Slovar'*, 419.
6. Timmer gives several examples of typographic atheism. In a Russian book on the art of translation Schiller is quoted in German, "gott" being the only substantive to appear in lower case. In another Russian translation manual Pushkin is quoted in English with "god" appearing in lower case whereas "the Devil" commences with a capital. Ch.B. Timmer (1969), 167-168.
7. What Th. Blakeley called the *via negativa*, *via positiva* and *via negationis* to describe the various ways of arriving at proof in Soviet atheism can be seen as the atheist mirror image of a classic fundamental theology. *Via negativa*, means demonstrating that those properties and functions traditionally attributed to the concept of god – intangibility, the capacity to create, ethical perfection and rational unrecognizability – are untenable. *Via positiva* is the Soviet version of the theory of Feuerbach/Marx on human estrangement; as such it can be matched against the theological concept of man being naturally attracted to God. Lastly, *via negationis* means the rebuttal of the classical proofs of God's existence given by Western medieval philosophy Th. Blakeley (1969).
8. *O Religii i Cerkvi* (1981).
9. K. Pajusov (1982).

10. Pajusov, *op. cit.*, 53 and 56. The author concludes: "Indeed, whichever matter concerning the improvement of our armed forces' combat potential we consider – be it training, equipment and morale, combat readiness and preparedness or discipline – each problem exposes the potential of religion to hinder success in these matters" (57).
11. L.F. Il'ičev (1964), 46.
12. Gol'st (1975), 16.
13. *O Religii i Cerkvi*.
14. *Pravda* 14th April 1984.
15. *Pravda* 11th April 1984.
16. R.M. Rogova, sost. (1979), 140-148; A.N. Alekseev (1976), 258-284; A.V. Ivančenko (1978); *Ateističeskij Slovar'*, 46-47.
17. As happened to the party leader of Kirov. See *Sovetskaja Rossija* 18th May 1984.
18. The workings of social control in the areas of religion and atheism are clearly shown in the collected newspaper articles and readers letters in E. Voss, ed. (1977), 179-195.
19. *Ateističeskij Slovar'*: keyword *ateističeskoe obščestvennoe mnenie*.
20. Il'ičev, *op. cit.*
21. *Ateističeskij Slovar'*, 48-49.
22. L.V. Markin, sost, 1982), 79.
23. *Pravda* 15th June 1983.
24. *Izvestija* 11th December 1984.
25. J. Thrower (1983).
26. V.Z. Puškin (1983), 111.
27. *Ateističeskij Slovar'* (1983); *Nastol'naja Kniga Ateista* (1981).
28. *Karmannyi Slovar' Ateista* (1981).
29. *Istorija i Teorija Ateizma* (1974).
30. *Religii Mira: ežegodnik* 1982 (1982).
31. P. Ehlen (1972), 390.
32. D. Dudko (1976), 132.
33. *Pravda* 13th September 1985.
34. *Pravda* 28th September 1986.
35. *Pravda* 7th February 1987.
36. *Literaturnaja Gazeta* 6th May 1987. See also *Komsomol'skaja Pravda* 30th July and 3rd October 1986. Jevtušenko had anticipated Kuznetsov with an article in the October 10th 1986 edition of *Komsomol'skaja Pravda* rejecting the youth-paper's earlier criticism.
37. *Literaturnaja Gazeta* 13th May 1987. Nujkin's article in *Novyi Mir* 1987, No. 5, 245-259. Articles on these writers had already appeared

in 1986: *Literaturnaja Gazeta*, 14th May (on Bykov); *Literaturnaja Gazeta* 13th August and 15th October (on Ajtmatov); *Naš Sovremennik* No. 5, (on Astaf'ev); *Knižnoe Obozrenie* No. 5 (on Bykov). These articles suggest movement in Soviet atheism, a discussion or polemic between writers who are sympathetic to religion and desire an open approach to religio-philosophical and ethical themes – and doctrinaire professional atheists. It is too early to see whether or not this represents a new development in Soviet atheism. It is enough here to refer to Nujkin's article rejecting the old dogmatic school of Soviet atheism.

38. *Pravda Vostoka* 26th November 1986.
39. *Pravda* 16th April 1987.
40. *Pravda* 23rd January 1987.
41. *Pravda* 15th March 1987.
42. *Trouw* 19th March 1987.
43. T. van Boven (1967).
44. *Golos Rodiny* 1987, No. 11.
45. *Literaturnaja Gazeta* 4th February 1987.
46. *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* 1986. No. 1, 80.
47. *Moscow News* 1987, No. 1.
48. This should not be seen as a response to Jevtušenko's plea for a Soviet edition of the bible on the grounds of its great cultural significance for 19th century Russian literature, see *Komsomol'skaja Pravda*, 10th December 1986.
49. Plechanov (1977), 8 and 248-249.
50. A. Komeč (1987).
51. *Literaturnaja Gazeta* 13th May 1987.
52. P. Čadaev (1987).
53. *Literaturnaja Gazeta* 20th May 1987.
54. F. Mayer/Erzbischof Pitirim (1982).
55. Pitirim (1985).

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